The priesthood in the writings of Graham Greene.

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THE PRIESTHOOD

IN THE WRITINGS OF GRAHAM GREENE

by

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Abstract

Graham Greene became a Catholic in 1926 at the beginning of his career as a novelist, but it was only gradually that his mind turned to the study of theology, and in particular to those themes that lend themselves to dramatic portrayal and human characterization. The theological dimension of Graham Greene's writings is the very air in which his characters move and have their being. To ignore this theological dimension is to deprive his novels and plays of a transcendental quality that will ensure him a place among modern Christian prophets.

Inevitably this theological interest made him see in the priest a man divinely commissioned to deal with situations fraught with possibilities of ultimate success and failure both in his personal life and in his ministry among men.

How Graham Greene understood the priesthood in principle, and how he dealt with the individual priest in his main works of fiction is the theme of the present study.

The priests in Graham Greene's writings have so far received very little attention from critics and commentators, and the little mention that has been made of them has been for the most part unenlightened or positively mistaken.

In my work I try to evaluate these characters of Graham Greene. For example: I maintain that the "whisky priest" is not a failure and a sinner, as is commonly thought, but a

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martyr and a saint.

Graham Greene's work has generally been considered to be disenchanted and pessimistic; my contention will be that his work is essentially optimistic, and that all his writings are pervaded by Christian hope.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis studies the essential priesthood as portrayed by Graham Greene. I suggest that he was extraordinarily farsighted, anticipating as he did the present crisis among the priests and the dialogue with atheism - one forbidden but now demanded by the Church. While retaining the essential qualities of the priesthood he rejects all that is inessential and superfluous, thus predicting the fundamental change which we now see taking place.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not already been accepted, nor is being concurrently submitted in candidature, for any degree. It is the result of my own independent investigation, and all other sources of information and opinion are acknowledged in the footnotes

Fr. Leopoldo Durán

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Abbreviated Titles

by which Graham Greene's works are sometimes cited

in the references

B.O.C.: A Burnt-Out Case

B.R. : Brighton Rock

L.Ch. : The Lost Childhood

P.G. : The Power and the Glory

Th.P. : Three Plays

L.R. : The Lawless Roads

I.S.C.: In Search of a Character

J.W.M.: Journey Without Maps

Th.C. : The Comedians

C.E. : Collected Essays

M.W. : The Man Within

N.A. : The Name of Action

R.N. : Rumour at Nightfall

C.S. : Carving a Statue

S.T. : Stamboul Train

I.B. : It's a Battlefield

H.M. : The Heart of the Matter

E.M.M.: England Made Me

G.S. : A Gun for Sale

C.A. : The Confidential Agent

T.O.S.: Twenty-One Stories

E.C. : Essais Catholiques

E.A. : The End of the Affair

T.A. : Travels with my Aunt

S.R. : A Sense of Reality

THE PRIESTHOOD

IN THE WRITINGS OF GRAHAM GREENE

INTRODUCTION

When Graham Greene's novel The Comedians appeared in January of 1966, David Holloway wrote:

> "The first thing to say about Graham Greene's new novel The Comedians is that it is the best book that he has written since The Power and the Glory... Lapsed Roman Catholics examine their consciences; adultery is indulged in, but what a miserable business it is. Yet such is Mr. Greene's magic that it all seems new - or very nearly so. I don't think that anybody else alive could have written a better opening to a novel" (1)

Traditional themes of good and evil, divine grace and human weakness, the contest between God and Satan for the soul of man, are presented by Graham Greene in many of his novels with such literary perfection and theological understanding that he is hailed as "Britain's main literary export" (2), as our best living writer whose achievement is "a firm reiteration, in fresh and intelligent contemporary language, of 'the faith once delivered to the saints'" (3).

(1) The Daily Telegraph, 27. 1. 1966.

(2) David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene, (Edinburgh & London: Oliver and Hoy) p. 1.

(3) J.A.T. Robinson, Honest to God (SCM Press, 1967) p. 7.

In a prefatory letter to Dr. Michel Lechat, to whom he dedicates A Burnt-Out Case, the author is content to say:

> "This is not a roman à clef but an attempt to give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief, and non-belief" (4)

François Mauriac praises Greene's "gift for detecting 'the hidden presence of God in an atheistic world' and his skill in tracing the subtle, subterranean movements of grace operating outside the orbit of the temporal Church. 'The importance of Greene to the generation of Sartre and Camus is that to the existentialist claim of universal absurdity he opposes the mystery of an Infinite Love'" (5)

Since Greene became a Catholic, in 1926, his mind has turned increasingly to the study of theology (6), and in particular to those themes that lend themselves to dramatic portrayal and human characterization. Inevitably he saw in the priest a man divinely commissioned to deal with situations fraught with possibilities of ultimate success and failure both in his personal life and in his ministry among men.

How Graham Greene understood the priesthood in principle, and how he dealt with the individual priest in his main works

(4) A Burnt-Out Case (Heinemann, 1961, London).

(5) F. Mauriac, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1950-1956), vol. 7, p.262.

(6) "Theology is the only form of philosophy which I enjoy reading". Graham Greene, Carving a Statue (London: The Bodley Head, 1964), p.8. "in my spare time I read a good deal of theology - sometimes with fascination, sometimes with repulsia nearly always with interest". Graham Greene, Brighton Rock (London: The Collected Edition, Heinemann and Bodley Head,

of fiction is the theme of the present study (7).

The priests in Graham Greene's writings have so far received very little attention from critics and commentators, and the little mention that has been made of them has been for the most part unenlightened or positively mistaken. And in order to provide a literary background to Greene's treatment of the priest I shall devote the first chapter to a cursory examination of a few modern authors whose works generally present the priest as a remote idealistic figure, thus emphasizing the contrast with Greene's profound realism.

The second chapter will study some of the priests mentioned by Greene in his travel books, because, as the author himself tells us, it is during his travels that he has been able to collect the raw materials for his novels.

A serious study of Greene's works, especially when he deals with priests, is impossible unless one takes into account the theological dimension that gives a transcendent quality to his writings, and that theological dimension I shall discuss in language that has been forged throughout the centuries as an instrument of conceptual precision, scholastic terminology.

(7) The most revealing contributions to an autobiography of Graham Greene are contained in Mon Ami Graham Greene (Bruges: Desclée De Brouwer, 1957) . . . , by R. Matthews, a discussion in dialogue form. It takes Greene's life story up to the age of 24 and his first novel. "After that", says Greene, "I say my life is in my books". Cfr. V. Naipaul: Graham Greene, in The Daily Telegraph Magazine, March 8, 1968, p.23.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRIEST IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

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THE PRIEST IN CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

As far back as the 14th century we have in English literature Chaucer's portrayal of a variety of clerics. In the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales we read:

> A good man was ther of religioun,
> And was a povre Persoun Of A Toun,
> But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk (1)

A less flattering description of other priests and monks is given elsewhere, but in his approach to all of them Chaucer reveals great insight both into the sacredness of the priestly office and into the foibles of human nature that often persist in the office-holders.

Half a century before Chaucer, in Spain, we have the Archpriest of Hita, Juan Ruiz, disclosing the tensions and failures of his own life in El Libro de Buen Amor (2).

Pascal's Provincial Letters, in the 17th century, have had a significant influence in European literature on the priesthood, especially on the Jesuits. Pascal pillories the Jesuits unmercifully for what he regards as their besetting sin: intellectual pride coupled with moral laxity, as shown in their

(1) The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by F.N. Robinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.21.

(2) Juan Ruiz, El Libro de Buen Amor (Madrid: Edición crítica de Joan Corominas, ed. Gredos, 1967), stanzas 181, 1485, etc.

hair-splitting casuistry (3).

A modern spiritual writer, Josef Sellmair, speaks at length of the tensions between the priest and the man, of the estrangement of the priest from the world, and he assembles a number of reflections on this theme taken from novels by Bernanos, Mauriac, and Greene. Then he comments:

> "Good and evil, truth and lies, virtue and vice have for some time now been the themes of modern writers, a change that represents an as yet hardly perceptible rejection of the classical ideal of mere loveliness of form. Time has passed judgement on this last and has found it wanting... George Bernanos, François Mauriac... Graham Greene will one day stand out in literary history as representative of the new attitude" (4).

Two modern authors will be dealt with here very briefly in order to provide a literary background to Greene's treatment of the priesthood, leaving aside, e.g., J. Joyce, E. Waugh, and J.F. Powers who also deal with the priesthood but are not directly connected with G. Greene in the literary sphere.

GEORGES BERNANOS

The Star of Satan (5) presents us with the character sketch of a priest caught in the cross-winds of heaven and hell. The natural and supernatural intermingle in a world that

(3) The Provincial Letters (Penguin Classics, 1967), pp. 61, 74,75, 79, 84, etc.

(4) The Priest in the World, (London: Burns and Oates, 1954), p. 9.

(5) The book appeared in 1926, under its French title Sous le Soleil de Satan. Translated into English by Veronica Lucas.

combines St. Augustine's "Two Cities", which until the end of time are spiritually divided, ministering to salvation or damnation. The theme is that of the parable of the wheat and the tares, and the field where the struggle reaches its climax is the life of a priest who stands as mediator and whose fall spells ruin to the faith and holiness of people under his influence.

From the novel's earliest scenes evil is rampant. Mouchette, a girl of sixteen, lives in concubinage with the local Medical Officer of Health and with the Marquis De Cadigan. The priest, Fr. Donissan, is a prey to scruples, is misunderstood by his Superior, is tempted to despair and is beset with pastoral problems. He seems to engage Satan in naked conflict. The Evil One's presence and power he palpably experiences in a variety of disguises, sometimes even in the shape of a good Samaritan. The priest is not deceived.

> "The parish priest of Lumbres did believe in the devil, and to-night he was afraid of him... The Star abjured by the morning: Lucifer, or False Dawn... This poor parish priest of Lumbres knew so many things that the Sorbonne has never heard of" (6).

> "The Satan of <u>your</u> strange ritual is only a distortion of your own image, for the devotee of the carnal universe is his own Satan. The monster laughs when he happens to notice you, but he has not closed his fangs upon you. He does not appear in your drivelling books... But he exists all the same" (7).

(6) <u>The Star of Satan</u> (London: Bodley Head, 1927) p.160.

(7) Ibid. p.131.

Fr. Donissan is resolved to fight Satan by the power of the cross of Christ, wielding the weapons of prayer and penance. He overcomes the temptation to despair, and his whole approach to sinners is buoyed up by hope. Like St. Paul, he even offers to become a reprobate if that can serve to bring sinners to salvation:

> "I do not wish for joy... I do not even wish to hope... What remains to me? Only hope. Withdraw it from me. Take it. If I can do it without hating You, I will yield up to You even my chance of salvation, I will damn myself for the sake of those souls which You, in mockery of my efforts, have confided to me"... (8).

Between the priestly characters portrayed by Bernanos and those by Greene there are some striking resemblances but also great discrepancies. We cannot say for sure whether Greene was influenced by Bernanos, but whereas the Bernanos novel is "an unexpected story pierced by a storm wind coming from heaven and hell", Greene, in The Lost Childhood, speaks of "perfect evil walking the world where perfect good can never walk again" (9), and in The Power and the Glory he says of the whisky priest's daughter

> "the world was in her heart like the small spot of decay in a fruit" (10)

In The Potting Shed Fr. William Callifer, like Fr. Donissan, looks to the crucifix when tempted to despair, and mutters:

(8) Ibid. p.133.
(9) The Lost Childhood (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), p.17.
(10) The Power and the Glory (London: Heinemann, 1961), p.102.

"I thought I had lost Him for ever" (11). Fr. James Brown, in The Living Room, is a cripple like Fr. Menou-Segrais, the priest in charge of the parish of Lumbres. And yet, while Bernanos' priests seem to be moving on the empyrean heights of sanctity, Greene's priests are for the most part "on the border of crisis".

In The Diary of a Country Priest (12) Bernanos develops further the dramatic struggle of a priest against the powers of evil.

> "How much more of mystery there is in the fierce inquisitiveness of devils, their horrible solicitude for humanity... Ah, if we could view with angelic sight those maimed human beings"... "Satan is too hard a master... The world of evil is so far beyond our understanding" (13).

Once again we have the priest battling with despair:

> "The sin against hope - the deadliest sin and perhaps also the most cherished, the most indulged. It takes a long time to become aware of it, and the sadness which precedes and heralds its advent is so delicious! The richest of all the devil's elixirs, his ambrosia" (14).

The priest is plunged in darkness of soul -

> "A terrible night. No sooner had I shut my eyes than desolation came upon me" (15).

(11) Three Plays (London: Mercury Books, 1962), p.139.

(12) Diary of a Country Priest (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1965), pp. 83 and 124. Translated into English by Pamela Morris. The book appeared in 1936, under its French title Journal d'Un Cure de Campagne.

(13) Ibid. p.83.

(14) Ibid. p.95

(15) Ibid. p.76.

"In my soul nothing. God is silent. Silence" (16).

The nearer he approaches God in holiness the greater is the trial:

> "I feel that the worst is still to come; the real temptation which I await is far beyond, advancing slowly upon me, heralded by delirious cries" (17).

Bernanos idealizes his priests. To us they seem unreal. No doubt there are priests who have been and are going through these mystical tribulations on the steep ascent of Mount Carmel, but most priests are men of flesh and blood with all the ills that flesh is heir to. The ordinary priest has lofty aspirations, but

> "There shall always be the Church and the World
> And the Heart of Man
> Shivering and fluttering between them, choosing
> and chosen,
> Valiant, ignoble, dark, and full of light
> Swinging between Hell Gate and Heaven Gate.
> And the Gates of Hell shall not prevail.
> Darkness now, then
> Light" (T.S. Eliot: The Rock,) (18).

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC

As soon as we read the works of François Mauriac, especially where priests are the main characters, we notice how different these are from the priests portrayed by Bernanos. The latter speaks of one world in which good and evil take issue

(16) Ibid. p.109.
(17) Ibid. p.109.
(18) Lord David Cecil, The Oxford Book of Christian Verse (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.530.

for the soul of man; the former speaks of two worlds that do not mix spiritually. There is, according to Mauriac, the natural world of the soul governed by the laws of psychology and the supernatural world governed by grace; and the priest, armed with God-given powers, breaks into the scene like a Deus ex machina, opens the sluices of divine grace, and brings about repentance and a happy ending.

In The Dark Angels (19) the main character, Gradière, has all the appearances of an innocent and charming young boy who enters the seminary to prepare for the priesthood, but far from being an angel of light, he turns out to be a child of perdition. He leaves the seminary and uses his charm to ruin everyone who has ever loved or befriended him.

Fr. Alain Forcas finds himself enmeshed in a network of crime created by Gradière, his victims and his accomplices. He is snubbed as being ineffectual and innocent; he is tormented by remorse for yielding to advice to send away his own sister to Paris and leave her there destitute and forlorn. He is obsessed with the consciousness of being a failure. He finds that he evokes even hatred instead of affection from children and old people. But he suffers in silence and prays for all.

The priest, as depicted by Mauriac, is a wonder-worker

(19) The Dark Angels (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951). Translated by J.H.F. McEwen. The book appeared in 1936, under its French title, Les Anges Noirs.

in the realm of grace. Evil and grace seem to prevail over all the laws of psychology. Greene is much more sensitive to the ordinary priest's daily struggle.

A Woman of the Pharisees (20) presents M. l'Abbé Calou as a saint among sinners. He is asked to take into his house and educate a boy, Jean, the son of the Comtesse Du Mirbel. The boy proves to be a great challenge for the priest's heroic patience and kindness. In spite of this Fr. Calou meets with little but rebuff and even downright calumny. In mystical prayer he finds his sources of strength.

The Lamb (21) marks a change in Mauriac's approach to the priesthood and to the workings of good and evil. He takes up again the sinister character of Jean Du Mirbel and associates him and his influence for evil with a boy named Xavier who is nagged by the feeling that his survival throughout the war has destined him to become a victim of reparation for sinners. "I want to take my place with sinners", he says, "to be dedicated to their service, handed over to them, saved with them, damned with them" (22). But he succumbs to Jean's influence after consulting with a priest who had lost the faith and who told him:

(20) A Woman of the Pharisees (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946). Translated by Gerard Hopkins. The book appeared in 1941, under its French title La Pharisienne.

(21) The Lamb (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955). Translated by Gerard Hopkins. The book appeared in 1954, under its French title L'Agneau.

(22) Ibid.pp. 25 - 26.

> "I am, you know, what is generally called a good priest. Never a breath of scandal, not a thing against me... Don't run away with the idea that our country folk expect more of us than to baptize, marry and bury them, and in between, to give them the Communion - they don't even say First Communion, because it is generally understood that there is but one..." (23).

And the priest goes on to say that he is fairly comfortable as regards material wants, but his faith is no longer that of his former years, he now picks and chooses like an intelligent man and refuses to torture himself about faith and salvation.

It seems that Mauriac is perturbed by what he thinks is a steep decline of faith among priests in the post-war years, and the boy Xavier, although he renounces the idea of becoming an official minister of the Church through Holy Orders, offers himself to God to carry the priest's cross and to die for the salvation of Jean and his wife Michele and for the uncaring priest.

In <u>The Lamb</u> there are many traces of Greene's influence over Mauriac. When Xavier says: "If only I had saved one single person" (24), we are reminded of the whisky priest's "If I had only one soul to offer, so that I could say: Look what I've done..." (25). And when Jean Du Mirbel asks Xavier: "Do you believe it was the Evil One who set me on

(23) Ibid, p.120.
(24) Ibid, p.155.
(25) <u>The Power and the Glory</u>, p.271.

your road?", we remember Blacker in The Hint of an Explanation and his attitude towards a child who afterwards became a priest (26).

Greene and Mauriac draw very close together in their treatment of the priesthood in The Lamb where the priestly task of being burdened with the sins of the world and with personal failings is seen as the priest's special vocation to share in the Mission of Christ the Lamb of God and the Great High Priest.

Philip Stratford, in his book Faith and Fiction, says about Mauriac and Greene:

> "Despite differences in style and tradition, they have confronted many of the same creative problems, and their solutions often complement one another" (27).

Later he adds:

> "Greene is certainly indebted to Mauriac for the form of The End of the Affair" (28).

(26) The Lamb, p.31.

(27) Philip Stratford, Faith and Fiction (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1964), p. XI.

(28) Ibid. p.197.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRIEST IN GRAHAM GREENE'S TRAVEL BOOKS AND ESSAYS

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THE PRIEST IN GRAHAM GREENE'S TRAVEL BOOKS AND ESSAYS

Graham Greene has been a constant traveller since 1930. In 1957 alone he covered more than 44,000 miles. His journeys have taken him all over the world in search of background and character material for his works of fiction. He has recorded his impressions and experiences in three travel books: Journey without Maps, The Lawless Roads, and In Search of a Character, which provided him with material for his three best-known novels: The Power and the Glory, The Heart of the Matter, and A Burnt-Out Case. A note to the third edition of The Lawless Roads informs us that "those interested may find on page 129 and the succeeding pages the source of my story, The Power and the Glory" (1).

Other novels and what he calls "Entertainments" - Stamboul Train, England Made Me, The Third Man, Loser Takes All, The Quiet American, Our Man in Havana, and The Comedians, - are based respectively on journeys to Istanbul, Stockholm, Vienna, Monte Carlo, Saigon, Cuba, and Haiti. "I had to make four visits of three months each to Indo-China for The Quiet American", he tells us (2).

(1) The Lawless Roads (London: Heinemann, 1955), note to 3rd ed.

(2) In Search of a Character (London: The Bodley Head, 1961) p.9.

On his travels he came across and stayed with a number of priests, especially on his visits to Mexico and The Congo.

1. Journey without Maps, published in 1936, gives us his impressions and meditations of his first visit to Africa, to Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Grand Bassa on the coast. (3). There he discovered "a simplicity that was in strong contrast with the neurotic 'misery, violence, evil' of the modern civilized world". He found laughter and love in those small primitive villages. "Their laughter and their happiness seemed the most courageous things in nature. Love, it has been said, was invented in Europe by the troubadours, but it existed here without the trappings of civilization" (4).

His sense of disappointment with civilization deepened as he considered "what man had made out of the primitive, what he had made out of childhood" (5). His words recall those of Wordsworth's:

> And much it grieved my heart to think
> What Man had made of Man.

Greene mentions briefly two Catholic priests in this travel book, the priest who instructed him before he became a Catholic, and a priest who was expelled from the Liberian

(3) After reading "King Solomon's Mines", Africa impressed itself indelibly on Greene's mind, and he was determined to go there. Graham Greene, The Lost Childhood (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1954), p.14.
(4) Journey without Maps (London: Heinemann, 1962), p.87.
(5) Ibid. p.278.

Republic. The Nottingham priest who instructed him had been an actor, but since taking Holy Orders he had been debarred from attending the theatre. By way of compensation the priest's bookshelves were littered with plays. Greene's reception into the Church was inwardly a very unemotional affair, the result of intellectual conviction; and exteriorly it took place in the drabbest of surroundings: in Nottingham R.C. cathedral one foggy afternoon about four o'clock, alone with the fat priest; after which he shook hands with the priest and went off to a salmon tea and the company of a dog that was repeatedly sick on the mat in his dreary lodgings near the Nottingham station. Father Jean, in A Burnt-Out Case, who "nurtured the character of a film fan as though it would help him to wipe out an ugly past", was probably created by Greene out of his own reminiscences of the Nottingham priest. And speaking to Ronald Matthews, he told him that instead of meeting an ascetic and intellectual man, as he hoped, he met "a big fat devil, like the gay friars of the pictures which adorn some sea lodgings, fishing or drinking" (6).

The other Catholic priest mentioned in Journey without Maps Greene did not meet personally, but from what information he received about him, the portrayal is anything but flattering.

(6) Ronald Matthews: Mon Ami Graham Greene, chapter 10. Cfr. J.W.M., p.116.

It was the sad case of a priest in Liberia who had fallen foul of the new Commissioner:

> "There was a Catholic priest at Sanoquelleh, his (the Commissioner's) headquarters, and the previous Commissioner had been married to a Catholic. The priest had resented the difference between Dunbar and his predecessor; Dunbar stood strictly to the letter of the law, allowing the priest no privileges. The priest tried to get rid of him, writing letters to the President in Monrovia; and the heat and desolation worked on both men. At last the priest saw his chance when one of the men working on the roads fell sick. He took him into the mission and the man died there. Immediately the priest wrote a letter accusing Dunbar of having starved his workers and beaten one to the point of death. Dunbar acted with admirable promptitude; he arrived at the mission with a squad of soldiers before the man was buried and carried both the body and the priest over the eighteen miles to Ganta, where he asked the American doctor to examine the body. Dr. Harley exonerated him and the priest was expelled from the Republic" (7).

Greene makes honourable mention of non-Catholic missionaries: the American Episcopal monastic community that worked in cooperation with a few English Anglican nuns, and a Doctor Harley, a Methodist medical missionary. He notes with evident admiration and satisfaction the contrast between the popular prejudices prevailing in certain circles about Christian missionaries and the sober reality of what he witnessed:

> "A great deal of nonsense has been written about missionaries. When they have not been described as the servants of imperialists or commercial exploiters, they have been regarded as sexually abnormal types who are trying to convert a simple happy pagan people to a European religion and stunt them with European repressions. It seems

(7) Ibid. pp.208-209.

> to be forgotten that Christianity is an Eastern religion to which Western pagans have been quite successfully converted. Missionaries are not even given credit for logic, for if one believes in Christianity at all, one must believe in its universal validity...." (8).

The Episcopalian monks and Anglican nuns, of the Order of the Holy Cross, had a missionary settlement in Bolahun, in Western Liberia. Greene was impressed by their gentleness and honesty:

> "There was something in this corner of a Republic, said to be a byword for corruption and slavery, that at least wasn't commercial. One couldn't put it higher than this: that the little group of priests and nuns had a standard of gentleness and honesty equal to the native standard" (9)

In answer to the accusation that Christian missionaries are the tools of imperialistic and commercial interests, he observes:

> "The missions in the interior of the Republic are, of course, peculiar in being completely free from political or commercial contacts. The black Government distrusts them and no European firm has any trading posts in the Liberian hinterland. Faith in their religion is the only thing which can have induced American monks and English nuns to settle at Bolahun" (10).

The Methodist medical missionary, Dr. Harley, was not a priest in Holy Orders, but was a shining example of Christian concern for the poor and the sick.

> "In Liberia I discovered another kind of missionary. I do not imagine Dr. Harley, the Methodist medical missionary, is unique in Africa: a man with a body and nerves worn threadbare by ten years' unselfish

(8) Ibid. p.92.
(9) Ibid. p.90.
(10) Ibid. p.92 .

work, cutting away the pus from the huge swollen genitals, injecting for yaws, anointing for craw-craw, injecting two hundred natives a week for venerial disease. He had made his home in this corner of Liberia with his wife and two children, curious little elderly yellow-faced boys; he had lost one child, who was buried at the mission. All the way along the Liberian border I had heard of him" (11).

Dr. Harley gave Greene the inspiration for creating the character Dr. Colin in A Burnt-Out Case (12).

Journey without Maps is Greene's first travel book, and although the Catholic priest gets but a brief and unsympathetic mention in it, there is a wealth of autobiographical data and psychological insight that surpasses in personal disclosure that of all his other books. He is, as Kunkel puts it, "a voyager within as well as a voyager without" (13). He is gradually building up a store of knowledge of human nature as well as of the potency of divine grace. His reception into the Catholic Church, far from leading him to an uncritical acceptance of the Catholic clergy, broadens his mind and sensibilities to the work of Redemption being accomplished outside the visible limits of the Catholic Fold.

Therefore, when Greene does deal at length with the Catholic priest, we know that he is not the victim of a narrow hero-worship.

(11) Ibid. p.204

(12) A Burnt-Out Case, pp. 14, 15, etc.

(13) F.L. Junkel: The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene: (New York, Sheed and Ward, 1959), p.3.

2. The Lawless Roads, first published in 1939, was the outcome of a visit to Mexico in the spring of 1938 where he had gone to investigate the anti-religious persecution that raged under the Cárdenas regime.

A long quotation from Cardinal Newman, in which he speaks of the baffling mystery of evil in the world, prefaces the book and sums up the atmosphere created in Mexico during the presidency of Cárdenas and before then, during the time of Calles-Obregón when the persecution raged still more fiercely. The eternal struggle between good and evil that had impressed itself so deeply on Graham Greene's mind ever since he had read King Solomon's Mines and The Viper of Milan was enacted in flesh and blood before his eyes in Mexico, especially in the state of Tabasco. He saw for himself the depths of degradation that men "having no hope, and without God in the world" can stoop to. His visit supplied him with raw materials for his great novel, The Power and the Glory (14).

During the Calles-Obregón persecution of the Church a great number of priests had been killed or imprisoned. In

Tabasco

(14) "Those interested may find on page 129 and the succeeding pages the source of my story, The Power and the Glory" (Note to third edition of The Lawless Roads).

> "every priest was hunted down or shot, except one who existed for ten years in the forest and the swamps, venturing out only at night; his few letters, I was told, recorded an awful sense of impotence - to live in constant danger and yet be able to do so little, it hardly seemed worth the horror" (15).

But during the Cárdenas regime which followed, the persecution abated in all but two of the states, and even here there was always a priest travelling around incognito and giving the Sacraments by stealth to the faithful few.

Greene met several bishops and priests in Mexico and he records his impressions of them, but his book begins with a sketch of a certain Father Pro, a young Jesuit priest who died a martyr's death in 1927 only two years after his ordination. He is a historical figure whose serious biography was written in 1954 by Fanchón Royer (16) and whose exploits revealed a man of exceptional talent, holiness, and courage matched by an inexhaustible fund of good humour. Greene clearly regards Father Pro as an exemplar of the priesthood during the Mexican persecution, but one that many others failed to imitate (17).

Five Mexican bishops gave Greene the opportunity of discussing religious matters with them, enabling him to assess

(15) The Lawless Roads, p.129.

(16) Fanchon Royer, Father Miguel Pro, S.J. (Dublin: Clonmore and Reynolds, 1955). His Cause for Beatification was introduced in 1952, twenty-five years after his execution.

(17) The Lawless Roads, pp. 11 and 12.

their influence and power of leadership over the ordinary people in the Church's struggle against the campaign of godlessness unleashed by the ruling classes:

The Archbishop of San Antonio, an "old, fiery, half-blind" prelate, who was so incensed by the appalling conditions of the manual workers of his archdiocese - they would shell pecan nuts by hand for as little as thirty cents a day - that he led the workers in strike action for better wages; The Bishop of Chiapas, who, Greene was informed, "was regarded by the Government as one of the most dangerous and astute of the Mexican bishops" (18) simply because, as Greene discovered, he was "an unsophisticated good old man living with the utmost simplicity in surroundings of pious ugliness" who "looked like a village priest and showed a kind of humble confused embarrassment at my genuflexion" (19), but who had been turned out of his diocese.

> "He spoke of it", writes Greene (20), "gently as a foreign land to which he would never now be able to return. It touched my imagination so that I began to regard the city of Las Casas hidden there in the mountains at the end of a mule track, with only one rough road running south, as the real object of my journey - and the beginning of going home".

The Bishop of Tulacingo spoke to Graham Greene about the Bishop of Havana - "the most hopeless place in all the

(18) Ibid. p.98.

(19) Ibid. p.99.

(20) Ibid. pp. 99-100.

Catholic world for missions" (21) - who lay dying in a Colombian hospital, crippled with sciatica; he told him of his great charity to the poor and his humility. Archbishop Ruiz y Flores, onetime Apostolic Delegate to Mexico and expelled by President Calles, celebrated his golden jubilee in the priesthood while Greene was in Mexico City on his return to England. Greene was invited to the celebration of the man who in 1932 had been put on an aeroplane with detectives and allowed to take nothing but his breviary (22), "a small old man with a Pickwickian face, if one can imagine Pickwick a little embittered by the world's violence and injustice - he had seen the worst days of all..." The Bishop of Tulacingo, who "had an agreeable air of authority and humour" (23), reminded Greene of an Italian diplomat. Behind his suave façade was a man of great character who constantly spoke of the supreme witness to the Faith by martyrdom:

"The Church needed blood. It always needs blood" (24) thus paraphrasing the famous dictum of Tertullian:

"Sanguis martyrum semen est christianorum";

and he thought it the first duty of bishops and priests to bear this witness. He also sang the praises of other bishops:

(21) Ibid. pp.271-272.
(22) Ibid. p.275.
(23) Ibid. pp.270-271.
(24) Ibid. p.270.

"I wish you could have met the Bishop of Veracruz. <u>There</u> is a man!"

and confirmed what Greene had heard of the Bishop of Chiapas. He was imprisoned at the same time as Father Pro, and during the worst days of persecution he had been a superb guide to Catholics, giving proof of extraordinary powers of organization. <u>The Bishop of Panama</u> is referred to only by hear-say, and does not enter the picture except by way of contrast: Greene heard of him from a Dr. Fitzpatrick, a Scottish Catholic who was appalled by the condition of the Church in Panama and by the stories he had heard of its bishop.

When speaking of the shrine of our Lady at Guadalupe, (25), the author takes occasion to give some of the historical facts of the sixteenth century that surrounded the origin of the shrine and the claims to authenticity of the visions. He mentions Bishop Zumárraga to whom the Indian peasant reported the visions, and then points to the tensions caused by racial prejudices within the Catholic Church, even among clerics. It is part of the background that Greene thinks is essential for a proper understanding of the religious situation in Mexico in the nineteen-thirties, and it enriches our knowledge of human nature which so often proves recalcitrant to the work of grace.

(25) Ibid. pp.101-107.

In The Lawless Roads Graham Greene speaks of a number of priests with unconcealed admiration, beginning with his great hero, Father Pro, who seems to dominate the whole book and establish in Greene's mind a norm of excellence by which to pass judgement on other priests:

> "Over there lay the grave of Pro, Tabasco with every church destroyed, and Chiapas where the Mass was forbidden" (26)

and meanwhile he hears from the poor people the lament: "We die like dogs", because there was no priests in Tabasco, with the exception of the "stranger". But in Monterrey Greene witnessed the sprinkling of ashes on Ash Wednesday and was touched to see people in their thousands queueing up for them. President Cárdenas' boast, that he would so educate the Mexicans that when the churches did open again they would be left empty, was an idle boast. The few priests still alive proved themselves courageous leaders who guided the people well by their example and their preaching. Greene describes a Mass he attended in Las Casas celebrated by a priest

> "hideously disfigured with mauve patches and his eyes were shielded with amber-tinted glasses" (27)

the result of torture. No wonder that same priest waxed eloquent on Holy Thursday when he preached on the need and the fruitfulness of sacrifice. He recalls the "whisky priest" in The Power and the Glory, and the valiant chaplain of

(26) Ibid. p. 30
(27) Ibid. p. 222.

Philipot's guerrillas who loved to comment on the saying of St. Thomas the Apostle: "Let us go up to Jerusalem and die with him", saying "the Church is in the world, it is part of the suffering in the world" (28).

In several passages of this travel book Greene warms to the Mexican priests:

> "I think there were only two classes of men I really liked in Mexico: the priests and the flyers" (29)

Dr. Fitzpatrick was of the opinion that "the priests in Tabasco were good men", although they had been shot or had fled for refuge in other states where persecution had become less fierce. Even the German Lutheran, Herr R, "had no ill to say of any priest he had known here in the old days" (30), however much he disliked the priests' dogmas. And he told Greene about a priest who had gone to Palenque to say Mass, but was so sick and underfed that Herr R. "insisted he should not go to Mass before he had breakfasted", and "to ensure this, when his guest was asleep, he locked him in, but when he went to call him he found the priest had escaped to church through the window" (31). Greene's comment: "One felt that the Mexican priesthood in that politely unobtrusive act had shown up rather well" (32).

(28) The Comedians (London: The Bodley Head, 1966), p.308.
(29) The Lawless Roads, p.141.
(30) Ibid. p.180.
(31) Ibid. p.180.
(32) Ibid. p.180.

The following are some of the priests mentioned:

Father López, the workers' priest, was the right-hand man of the old Archbishop of San Antonio in his struggle to improve the conditions of labour. Whereas one Mexican bishop had hidden copies of Leo XIII's encyclical letter "Rerum Novarum" in his cellar, and others had succumbed to pressure against giving it publicity, the Archbishop and Fr. López organised a workers' strike. Eventually the priest was outmanoeuvred by the employers and Communists took over the leadership of the strike. "This strike", comments Greene, "was the first example I had come across of genuine Catholic Action on a social issue" (33).

The Intellectual Priest that Greene met in San Luis Potosí was a remarkable organizer of schools and a wonderful teacher. The girls in the classes were taught a great range of subjects from cooking to Christian apologetics. He "was an intellectual, with a European doctorate in philosophy", but the girls knew exactly what he was talking about because "war made understanding easy between very different minds", and he spoke of revolution "in the form of the Sermon on the Mount" spiced with very witty remarks and anecdotes to keep them alert. He spoke very quietly, never raising his voice, giving the effect of great confidence and great love (34). The girls would go back to the daily drudgery, but they had a leader they could trust, they were not alone. All this in the teeth of

(33) Ibid. p.22
(34) Ibid. pp.52-53.

Government opposition and in violation of the Constitution which imposed confiscation for such deviations.

The Happy Prisoner, Father Q. was another priest mainly concerned with education - the main battlefield of the Church v. the State. He excelled in sense of purpose and efficiency combined with a great sense of humour, laughing "with genuine care-free mirth at his own arrest a few years back" saying "it was the happiest time of our lives" in view of the camaraderie of the cells, the hope and exultation, under the light of death - death by martyrdom for which he longed (35).

The Sower of Peace, was a priest in Orizaba - "a thin, unshaved, impoverished man with a few words of English" - to whom Greene made his confession and in an instant "gained a sense of peace and patience and goodness" relieving him of bitterness and horror at human nature (36).

Padre Rey is the name given to a priest about whom Dr. Fitzpatrick spoke at length with Graham Greene. He had a wife and daughter, having married - he said to excuse himself - before he became a priest; but his reputation among the people was that of a poor helpless creature who had yielded to Government laws enjoining marriage for priests in defiance of the laws of the Church. Dr. Fitzpatrick found

(35) Ibid. pp.85-86.
(36) Ibid. p.180.

himself in very straitened circumstances economically and very lonely away from his own wife and son, so he often visited Padre Rey and discovered in him genuine kindness (37).

But the most interesting mention of a priest in The Lawless Roads is undoubtedly that of a shadowy figure, reported to Greene by Dr. Fitzpatrick, who hid by day and ministered by night in Tabasco, the state where every church had been destroyed, and where the only recognized God was Garrido Canabal, the dictator who used every device and cruelty to efface the thought of God from men's minds. The fugitive priest went in constant danger of his life amid the forests and swamps, doing what little he could for his scattered flock for a period of ten years until his persecutors finally caught him and had him shot by a firing squad.

In his novel, The Power and the Glory, Greene immortalizes this priest making him the hero of the story. In chapter four of this study we shall see how dramatically Greene combines and integrates into one outstanding personality the various strands of character and situation reported to him by Dr. Fitzpatrick of priests that the latter had known or heard of in Tabasco. Here we shall merely advert to Greene's growing awareness of the many-sidedness of human nature coupled with a profounder sense of tolerance for human weaknesses even in

(37) Ibid. p.147.

the priest , the chosen instrument of God's grace. In his diary he has expressions that reveal his increasing understanding and his diminishing readiness to condemn. After citing examples of unworthy priests he merely says:

> "it is a depressing fact that persecution does not necessarily produce Father Pros"

and then makes this pertinent remark:

> "who can judge the temptation to such a priest, living in a Godless state, seeing the world and the flesh grossly triumphant among the swaggering do-nothing pistoleros of Tuxtla, to make what money he could while he could?" (38)

with reference to a story retailed to him about a priest who refused to baptize a child because the mother offered him fifty centavos short of the two pesos he demanded for each baptism.

The seeming incompatibility of sin and grace within the priest and his ministry is dealt with in masterly fashion in The Power and the Glory, and the visit of Graham Greene to Mexico in 1937, especially to Tabasco, gave him precious materials from which to construe the story. If in Stamboul Train, Dr. Czinner is the failed revolutionary, and Pinkie is the failed bandit in Brighton Rock, the apparently failed priest in The Power and the Glory is Greene's great opportunity to show how God writes straight on our crooked lines, how divine life issues from human death, how substantial fidelity to God can abide in sinful appearances, how real victory is

(38) Ibid. p.200.

not the fruit of mere human striving but the crowning of God's gifts - to Whom all Power and Glory belong.

3. In Search of a Character, comprises a short introduction and two African journals. The first journal Graham Greene entitles Congo Journal; the second, Convoy to West Africa.

In Congo Journal Greene gives us his impressions of a journey that lasted from the end of January to the 8th of March, 1959, among them being sketches of a bishop, several priests, and a lay brother. He spent a good deal of his time in the company of the missionaries who entertained him in their mission stations and took him up the river Ruki on the bishop's boat.

Before setting out for the Congo, Greene had been thinking out a new novel situated in a leper colony, so during his journey he took notes and wrote down scraps of dialogue and character sketches to help him when he came to write the novel. The novel eventually appeared some months after his visit to the Congo under the title: "A Burnt-Out Case".

What most impressed Greene about the missionaries in the Congolese Mission was their rugged individuality and the laughter and banter they so freely indulged in when together in community. There was the bishop,

> "a wonderfully handsome old man with an eighteenth-century manner - or perhaps of an Edwardian boulevardier" (39)

(39) In Search of a Character, p.29.

who had led such an active, outdoor life in the best of health as a priest of fifty years standing, that when by accident he broke his leg and was confined to his room, he simply did not know how to ward off boredom. Then there was Father Henri who gave Greene some interesting facts about the natives and their response to Catholic belief and customs as well as their moral lapses. Father André was a reticent man, whereas Father Octave was very forthcoming. The captain of the bishop's boat, Father Pierre, was "a captain who hated the sea" because something always went wrong when he was on board, but he was very knowledgeable in the secrets of African lore. Father Georges had an obsession: shooting. And Greene, who was observing the priests carefully to find out how they conformed to his previous notions of missionaries, confesses:

> "I have never yet found in a missionary priest either the naïvety which I want for certain of them (the priests of his future novel), nor the harshness toward human failing, nor the inquisitiveness. These men are too busy to worry about motives - they are concerned with cement, education, electrical plant - not motives. How can I get rid of this falsity?" (40).

Greene was wrestling with characterization for his projected novel, and the impressions of his stay with the missionaries, jotted down in his journal, are continually being revised. Thus, shortly after the above entry, he writes:

(40) Ibid. p. 39.

> "More and more worried the last few days whether anything will come of this book. Perhaps I am not accepting the reality but struggling against it, and at the same time I am frightened of what the doctor calls 'sentimental', which is his word for picturesque or dramatic.... The priests are more concerned with engineering, electricity, navigation and the like, than with the life of man or God - but that is X's wrong impression. He has come seeking another form of love and is faced with electric turbines and problems of building, and he fails to understand the priests as much as they fail to understand him" (41)

X is the fictional character with whom Greene seeks to identify himself while preparing and writing his future novel - and X became Querry in The Burnt-Out Case. The above criticism of the missionaries is voiced by Father Thomas in the new novel:

> "His companions, it seemed to him, spent their lives with small concerns which they could easily discuss together - the cost of foot-baths, a fault in the dynamo, a hold-up at the brick kiln; but the things which worried him he could discuss with no one" (42).

Convoy to West Africa, the second part of In Search of a Character, was written by Greene in 1941 without any future book in mind, merely for his own amusement. During the voyage he read a detective story by Michael Innes which set his mind in motion to write an "entertainment" he was to call The Ministry of Fear, written during some leisure periods in Freetown.

There is little mention of priests in this short journal. He merely records making his confession to a "nice young

(41) Ibid. pp.49-50.

(42) A Burnt-Out Case, p.17.

priest who called me 'son' and whose understanding was of the simplest" (43) in Belfast before the convoy set sail for Africa. A "towsled housekeeper tried to send me away when I asked for confession. 'This is no time for confession', trying to shut the door in my face" - an incident that Greene made use of years later when writing his second play The Potting Shed.

4. Collected Essays, by Graham Greene, published in March 1969, (44) contain three biographical sketches based on the lives of Mgr. Ronald Knox, Pope Pius XII, and Pope John XXIII. The essays were written over a period of years but their collection, Greene tells us in an Author's Note, adhered to the principle of not including anything of which he could say that, if he were writing in 1969, he would write in a different manner.

In the essay entitled The Oxford Chaplain Greene gives us in three pages of condensed writing his reflexions prompted by Evelyn Waugh's The Life of Ronald Knox (45). He compares a priest to an iceberg - "little shows compared with what lies beneath: we have to dive for depth" (46) - and particularly so when dealing with a priest of Mgr. Knox's intellectual and spiritual calibre. Greene recognizes that intellectual priests

(43) In Search of a Character, p.104.
(44) Collected Essays (London: The Bodley Head, 1969).
(45) Evelyn Waugh: The Life of Ronald Knox (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1962).
(46) C.E., p.376.

"are as necessary to the Church as the apostles of the darker, poorer, more violent world" (47). He also speaks of the mystical quality of Ronald Knox's personality, a quality that was God's gift but perfected through trial and tribulation, especially the misunderstandings of which he was the victim in his dealings with the Catholic Hierarchy, which Knox bore with exemplary patience and tact.

The Paradox of a Pope is an essay written in 1951 about Pope Pius XII, in which Greene speaks of him as a priest who from his early years had been steered towards an official career in the diplomatic service of the Church but who impressed people as first and foremost a priest and only after that, a diplomat. The Pope was convinced that "the world cannot be saved by diplomacy" (48), and therefore he offered himself as a living sacrifice.

> "In his presence one feels that there is a priest who is waiting patiently for the moment of martyrdom" (49).

For Graham Greene, Pius XII has a Franciscan love for children and birds, and yet "is regarded as a very travelled, very modern man". He says Mass with grace and precision. He conveys the impression of saintliness. The young girl Maria Goretti, who died of wounds inflicted by an assailant with a

(47) Ibid. p.377.

(48) Ibid. p.393.

(49) Ibid. p.390.

last word of forgiveness for her murderer, was canonized by Pius XII. The light in the pope's room burns until one o'clock in the morning - he is a man of intense prayer and study.

A reading of Pope John XXIII's "Journal of a Soul" prompted Greene to write an essay under the title Eighty Years on the Barrack Square in which he singles out Pope John's "genius for simplicity" and his blunt self-analysis. At the age of eighteen the future pope, then a seminarist, wrote in his diary:

> "I have always been a bit crazy, a bit of a numskull, and more than ever so in recent days. This is all my virtue amounts to" (50).

Greene derived great profit from this journal which is constantly stressing the transitoriness of this life and the author's own shortcomings. He found Roncalli's description of his ordination day very moving, being a day of continual ecstasy. A final vignette presents the elderly and wise pope talking to a little girl suffering from leukemia; they both talk and listen with great seriousness; one wonders which of them was more the child or more the saint.

Greene's gift for entering into the thoughts and feelings of others, beyond appearances, is shown to advantage in these three essays concerning three great priests. The priests of his fictional works are mostly priests in a crisis - intellectual, moral, pastoral - but these three saints offered him a

(50) Ibid. pp.397-398.

contrast and served to awaken him still further to the power of divine grace when given unfettered entry into the full range of one's activities and personality. The latter, however, are mountain peaks; Greene's fictional priests are nearer to the valleys and foothills where most men, including priests, wage their daily struggles and move in caravan as pilgrims bound for eternity.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRIEST IN GREENE'S EARLY NOVELS

CHAPTER III

THE PRIEST IN GREENE'S EARLY NOVELS

"THE MAN WITHIN"

If we are to consider Graham Greene's approach to the priesthood we must take The Power and the Glory as the centre-piece and develop the theme in three stages:

1. His treatment of the priest in works prior to this novel,
2. His treatment in The Power and the Glory, and
3. His treatment in subsequent works of fiction.

In 1929 Heinemann published The Man Within from the pen of Graham Greene, after refusing two earlier ones in which, as Greene told his friend Ronald Matthews, priests were among the characters portrayed (1).

The leading character of "The Man Within" is a young man, Francis Andrews, whose father - "only a brute" - is the skipper of a rum-running ship. When the father dies the ship is taken over by Carlyon. Andrews, who presents the problems of a

(1) Greene "has left strict orders in his will that they should never be published in extract or any other form".

split personality (2), runs away from the ship and betrays his friend Carlyon and all his fellow smugglers to the excise men, after which he hides in a Sussex cottage in the company of a young orphan girl named Elizabeth. The girl is shown to be an instrument of God's Grace for Andrews, a potential redemptress, very much as Rose is for Pinkie, in "Brighton Rock". In the end both Andrews and Elizabeth commit suicide.

The critics are not agreed as to the merits of the book. Whereas J. Atkins dismisses it with the remark "It was prentice work, and Greene might even be considered lucky to have had it published", F.L. Kunkel thinks it "is a remarkably good first novel". Greene himself was not pleased with it, as we can see in a note to the uniform edition; and if he allows it to be re-printed it is only because "an author may be allowed one sentimental gesture towards his own past".

Nevertheless, in this first published novel there are many elements that are of interest as foreshadowing Greene's later developments: sex (3), suicide, treason, scathing criticism of a corrupt civilization, prophetic dreams, a longing for peace, hell, and especially the constant struggle between good and evil, between the Grace of God and sin. And although the word "sin" is not explicitly mentioned until page 185, in

(2) Hence the title of the novel. "It is as though, 'Andrews said slowly', there were about six different people inside me".
(3) In chapter nine of this novel there is a very suggestive passage. Jacques Maritain asked the author to expurgate offending passages.

connexion with Andrews' seduction of Lucy, the former throughout the whole story is telling Elizabeth that he is not worthy to live with her, because "she is a saint" and he is not. "Oh, there's no peace for me", cries out Andrews.

Elizabeth is probably the saintliest of all Greene's fictional female characters. More saintly perhaps than Sarah Miles who had a murky past, whatever her later trust in God and heavenly longings. Elizabeth symbolizes divine Grace in the guise of human love. Andrews and Lucy represent evil.

The Power and the Glory is a metaphisical drama at its highest in Greene, but The Man Within already contains veiled allusions to the Gospels. For example, Andrews looks upon Carlyon as his saviour, and even Elizabeth's saviour - "Carlyon must be there, 'he thinks'; he'll see that she's safe" (4). Carlyon saves both their lives. He calls Andrews "his Judas". Andrews calls Carlyon "friend", but like Judas and Christ (5), later betrays him. In the end, Andrews repents (6), and Carlyon forgives him (7). And while Andrews was at a distance from the house of Lucy with whom he had sinned, "after he had walked some miles a cock crew" (8).

. . . . . .

(4) Graham Greene, The Man Within (London: Heinemann, 1962), p.227.
(5) Ibid. p.235.
(6) Ibid. p.13.
(7) Ibid. p.45.
(8) Ibid. p.185.

Mr. Jennings, Elizabeth's guardian as a child, had died. The funeral service was attended by Andrews and many of the ordinary villagers. It was a raw day. Greene presents us with the picture of a clergyman officiating at the burial. It is not a flattering portrayal. The minister "was tall and thin and stooping"... "he snuffled between each phrase as he took long, loping strides through the graveyard. It was a raw day, and he appeared anxious to get through with a dreary business. Between every phrase he snuffled, and at the end of every sentence he gave a hasty furtive wipe at his nose with a corner of his surplice that blow out in the wind like a banner" (9). He was "a shambling priest". "The priest's voice grew rapid like the feet of a horse when its head is turned to home, faster and faster with the faintest trace of excitement at the thought of food and rest from journeying" (10).

The impression is one of a Christian minister whose mind is not on the words he utters or the actions he performs. "I know that my Redeemer liveth", he quotes from the Book of Job, "...and in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another". And while "he droned on" through the solemn words of a psalm and of a letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, the women at the

(9) Ibid. pp.28-29.

(10) Ibid. p.35.

graveside went on chattering. To Andrews it was just a lot of mumbo-jumbo.

The Anglican ritual used by Greene in the story, with its majesty of expression and cadence, served to point the contrast between profession and practice among ministers of religion, and brings out the deadening effect of routine. For a clergyman who had often repeated the impressive words of the burial service there came time when they ceased to register. He was drifting into that condition of spiritual lukewarmness mentioned by the Book of Revelation where it says: "You are neither hot nor cold. How I wish you were either hot or cold!"

> "The shambling priest was reading the lesson in a meaningless drawl muffled by the mist and his increasing cold. The words meant no more to him than did the dead man. It was a mechanic ritual less conscious than the act of brushing teeth" (11)

"THE NAME OF ACTION"

This novel was published in 1930 and dedicated to his wife who is here called Vivienne, instead of Vivien as in "The Man Within". Its title is borrowed from words in Hamlet.

The plot, briefly, is as follows. Kurtz, a German political exile, persuades Oliver Chant, a wealthy unmarried Englishman, the story's main character, to go to Trier and help the forces of freedom in their struggle against the dictator

(11) Ibid. p.33.

Paul Demassener who has taken control after a revolution. Oliver Chant falls in love with the dictator's beautiful French wife, Anne-Marie. The dictator is overthrown and wounded, and Chant goes with him, his enemy and rival into exile.

Paul Demassener and several other characters in the story are Catholics. This provides Greene with the opportunity of expressing Catholic beliefs about God, Divine Providence, and the Mass. One of the conspirators is quoted as saying of the village people "they are all good Catholics", as though he had in mind some criterion beyond Catholic schools and priests, or even attendance at Mass (12). And some of Greene's critics have pointed out that here we find the author's first laudatory reference to the Catholic Eucharist.

There are several references to the Catholic priest in the mouths of the conspirators. One of them says that the dictator "is afraid of the priests". The dictator would like to be in absolute control but he is aware of the priest' influence over the people in their individual and collective consciences, and realizes that the priests could put his power in jeopardy.

A second conspirator takes the opposite view - "the priests are all in Demassener's pockets" - a view that sometimes prevails in those Catholic countries where priests

(12) Graham Greene, The Name of Action (London: Heinemann, 1930), p.169.

receive financial support from the Government and are supposed to lend it their wholehearted allegiance. A third conspirator makes the derogatory statement that "priests are afraid of a Republic because they are afraid of light", which implies that religion and obscurantism are one and the same thing, and that priests thrive on people's ignorance, and would back up a dictatorship for their own interests.

These are three constant variations on the anti-clerical theme in traditionally Catholic countries.

In this novel Greene pays one of his finest tributes to the priesthood, voiced by a seemingly religionless man. Chant entered the church of Our Lady to meet Anne-Marie. In the church stands a coffin draped in velvet, and on it is a biretta to indicate that the deceased is a Catholic priest. While waiting for Anne-Marie Chant starts thinking about the celibate priesthood (13). He doesn't know how the priest lived, but he soliloquizes on how he should have lived. He conjures up an ideal priest: the priest's faith and calling governed by faith, his celibacy - his "barrenness" - with its yield a hundredfold. Perhaps the most telling part of the soliloquy is that which touches upon the priest's solitude, the most immediate and far-reaching consequence of his voluntary celibacy. The priest is a lonely man throughout his priestly life, lonely in mind

(13) Cfr. A.M. Carre, O.P., Celibacy: Success or Failure (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1960). E. Schillebeckx, O.P., Clerical Celibacy Under Fire (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968).

and heart as well as exteriorly. Perhaps this loneliness is the very essence of the sacrificial aspect of the priestly life. It is a loneliness that surrounds the priest'sdeath.

> "Long candles...revealed a coffin draped in velvet... A biretta showed that a priest was dead. There was one, Chant thought with some bitterness, who had died in the possession of a belief. He had lived with it all his life, so that now only the sexton and his son were troubled with the arranging of the ornaments of death. There would be no woman. The thing which he had loved best he had carried with him... His (Chant's) love was too uncertain to be called a belief. Yet like that priest I have no substitute, he thought. The other was the happier man... In his heart he longed to be able to share the coffin with the priest. It lay now alone beneath the feet of Christ like a winter field lit by a few stars. But in its barrenness lay the seed of new life" (14).

This is a remarkable insight into the companionless solitude of the priest at the end of the day when his work is done and he retires to a cold and empty house. Whereas in The Man Within we are presented with a living caricature of a minister of the Gospel, in this novel we see how Greene conceived of the ideal priest. Chant, the unbeliever, was touched by the grace of God because of the priest. The barrenness of priestly celibacy began to yield fruit.

"RUMOUR AT NIGHTFALL"

Published in 1931, one year later than The Name of Action, this novel was dedicated to Greene's parents. The plot is the

(14) N.A., ed.cit., pp.296-298.

most complicated of all Greene's plots, and is full of intricate explanations. The story takes place in Spain where a journalist by the name of Chase was sent by a London newspaper to report on the Spanish civil war. Most of the leading characters, like Chase and Crane, are non-Catholics, but Eulalia Monti, Crane's lover, is a Catholic. Religion is often mentioned as belonging to the landscape in which the action takes place. Even Crane and Eulalia confess to each other, but it is a confession where "God is left out".

Religion is depicted in some passages of the novel as boring, in others as giving rise to fanaticism. Colonel Riego, for instance, is far from being a level-headed religious man. Luis, a dying soldier, asks for a priest; but the priest is far away and would take hours to arrive, and arrive too late. So Col. Riego takes it upon himself to persuade Luis to make a public confession of his sins to his comrades for the good of his soul. The dying soldier misunderstands the situation and readily agrees thinking the priest had come and was speaking to him. He calls the colonel "Father".

> "Is it long since your last confession?... Two months?... More than two months?... Since your last confession, have you committed any carnal sin? More than once?... Was it with a woman?... Was she married?..."

The poor soldier hasn't the strength to move his lips, but the questioning goes on endlessly until the colonel

"kneeling by the body said gruffly: 'He's dead' " (15).

A caricature of the Father Confessor which recalls the confession by Stephen in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. A caricature of religion which evokes Mrs. Weber, "a good wife and good Catholic" in The Name of Action.

Greene speaks about priests in Rumour at Nightfall when he brings up a discussion as to whether they are wealthy or not. Chase maintains they are better off than people think, that they have their own devious ways of amassing wealth, for instance by "special Masses", and "dying bequests". The pope is spoken of as rolling in money, and that therefore the ordinary priest must follow suit.

> "If you were to see his palace in Rome - the orator says - you would be dazzled. The gold, the silver, the precious stones. And do you think he would let his priests be poor?... The richer the employer, the richer the servant" (16).

The simple cannot argue with the orator on general principles, but in San Juan they know poor priests. Graham Greene is familiar with the opinion that to sell the treasure of the Vatican would solve the problems of world poverty, and is possibly highlighting its absurdity.

Michael Crane and Eulalia Monti have just entered a Church when Crane owns up to Eulalia that he believes in the

(15) Rumour at Nightfall (London: Heinemann, 1931), pp.8-9.

(16) Ibid. p.43.

Eucharist. She feels very happy because she wants to marry a Catholic. But what priest would marry them? Then the confessional door opens and a priest crosses the church in front of them. And Greene describes this priest in a few words but remarkable completeness. He had the face, the strength, and the large limbs of a peasant, but something in him showed that his "traffic" was very different to that of an ordinary peasant. Outwardly he had the appearance of being ruthless, but as soon as he spoke one got a very different impression. In fact, although his life had been a hard struggle, he did his best to retain his good humour. "Like Quixote, he had been saddened by a constant unequal warfare, he had been perhaps tormented by his dreams, but like Sancho he had not lost his humour, a certain stupidity, good nature" (17).

His dreams were those of every good priest: world conquest for God. An impossible dream, of course, as he realizes in the course of daily life, but still an ideal.

Thanks to his sense of humour he was able to listen to Crane's arguments for marrying them there and then, however unorthodox they might seem.

> "Crane thought he could guess from his attitude some pity for illusions to be broken, some humour for ignorance to be dispelled, and, lurking at the corners of the mouth longing to be put into unpriestly words, a Rabelaisian raillery on the subject of the pleasures to come and the pains of childbirth" (18).

(17) Ibid.p.216.

(18) Ibid.p.216.

Crane was mistaken. The priest spoke a few words to Senorita Monti which she appreciated. He really understood the urgency of the situation. Moreover, he was a pious and charitable man. His genuflexion at the altar was made thinking that the Presence in the Eucharist was his only witness. He "bound the bleeding palm of the woman with strips of his cassock". At first, knowing the laws of the Church, he refused to marry the couple immediately but when he heard the shots inside the church and realized the urgency of the couple's demand, he went in search of two witnesses.

His life had not been an easy one. "His face, coarse, lined, battered by extremes of weather, disguised his age. Forty, fifty, sixty years, it was impossible to tell" (19).

Cervantes had divided humanity into Quixotes and Sanchos; Greene sees them both represented in this priest, a type at once idealistic and realistic. George Santayana said that "everything in nature is lyrical in its ideal essence, tragic in its fate, and comic in its existence". The true priest, in spite of, or rather because of, his "barrenness" discerns the Will of God in all things and looks upon people and events with a relish born of this supernatural understanding.

Mercy would seem for Greene to be the outstanding quality demanded of the priest (20). And in general, the priests

(19) Ibid. p.216.
(20) Ibid. p.216.

described in Greene's novels before The Power and the Glory are excellent priests. We may surmise that Greene was first intent on embodying his ideal of the priest, but later on, as his contacts with priests developed, he came to see that priests were men like any others, and therefore he could write of them in terms of tragic failure, the same as he would of men like Dr. Czinner or Scobie. Moreover, this proved a great source of material for his fiction (21).

"STAMBOUL TRAIN"

This novel, first published in 1932, deals with a man's reflexions on his journey through life as symbolized by a trans-Europe express. Dr. Czinner, the leading character, looks back at the end of his journey and sums up his impression of the people who accompanied him.

> "He saw the express in which they had travelled breathing the dark sky like a rocket. They clung to it with every stratagem in their power, leaning this way and leaning that, altering the balance now in this direction, now in that. One had to be very alive, very flexible, very opportunist...He had been unable to retain his foothold on what was sometimes a ship and other times a comet, the world itself, or only a fast train from Ostend to Istanbul" (22).

(21) R. Matthews, op. cit., pp.219-220: "Quel échec, pour un catholique, pouvait être plus affreux que celui d'un prêtre, seul représentant d'un Dieu banni au milieu d'une population de milliers de personnes, et qui, cependant, trahit sa divine mission?".

(22) Stamboul Train (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp.226-227.

Dr. Czinner had failed in life, failed as a revolutionary, as a doctor, as a believer, failed in everything. His political aspirations had come to nothing. His religion he had dishonoured by his misdemeanours, and yet it nagged his conscience. He wanted God, the only One who could comfort him. He longed to be able to confess his sins as once he used to do "when a clear conscience could be bought at the price of a moment's shame: 'Since my last confession I have done this or that'. If, he thought with longing and a little bitterness, I could get back my purity of motive so easily, I should be a fool not to take a chance" (23). Then he realized there was a clergyman beside him in the carriage. With a great effort spurred on by his longing to make a confession he asked his companion whether he was a priest. "Not of the Roman persuasion", replied the Rev. Opie.

Czinner and Opie engaged in small talk for a while. Then Dr. Czinner pulled himself together and told the clergyman quite bluntly he wished to speak to him about confession. Mr. Opie, unwilling to venture into the realm of the doctor's personal problems, started somewhat pedantically to extol the merits of confession as an institution - "there is a great deal to be said for the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church. Modern psychology is working on parallel lines..." - and added a number of comments the doctor was not concerned to hear. What

(23) Ibid. p

the latter wanted was to clear up his own conscience and make a good confession (24).

Greene portrays the Anglican minister as a man who professed to think always the best of everybody but in practice did little for their spiritual welfare, or for their material comfort. He was the first to be told someone in the corridor was ill, but he did not leave the compartment to see what was happening, unlike Dr. Czinner who took it upon himself to give a helping hand (25). He was self-complacent. He thinks to himself "as long as one can get a sleeper, it is so unnecessary to travel first class. These second-class carriages are remarkably comfortable". He liked to impress with his knowledge of French. "Can I interpret for you?", he said to a fellow passenger when the newspaper boys called outside the train. "Is there any paper you want? Don't mind me if you want La Vie".

The Rev. Opie was planning to write "a spiritual anthology for the lay mind, something to take the place in the English Church of the Roman books on contemplation" (26). Opie was dreaming, and Dr. Czinner paid him little heed, the latter busying himself trying to make an act of contrition in preparation for a confession. But there was something Opie said that struck him.

"Are you a cricketer?" asked Opie. And after Czinner had given a snappy negative answer, the clergyman continued

(24) Ibid. p.139. (25) Ibid. p.139. (26) Ibid. p.139.

his monologue:

> "Never mind. You will understand what I mean. Suppose that you are the last man in; you have put on your pads; eight wickets have fallen; fifty runs must be made; you wonder whether the responsibility will fall upon you. You will get no strength for that crisis from any of the usual books of contemplation; you may indeed be a little suspicious of religion. I aim at supplying that man's need" (27).

To a man like Dr. Czinner, almost under sentence of death and longing to clear his conscience, Opie's garrulity was meaningless and unbearable. Yet the words "crisis", "responsibility", etc. challenged the doctor to ask a favour of the clergyman. "I wished to speak to you...of confession", said Czinner. Here was a heaven-sent opportunity to help a troubled soul, a chance for the clergyman to start writing his book on human happiness there and then, but the reverend gentleman refused to be drawn into Czinner's personal problems and contented himself with theories of rapprochement between confession and modern psychology. The doctor wondered whether Opie really believed in confession as a Sacrament, whether he believed in anything Christian at all. At least he could believe in helping a fellow human being and take him into his confidence.

The novelist portrays a Christian minister bereft of a real sense of vocation, a man with big ideas about his own importance, with dreams of writing the book to end all books

(27) Ibid. p.139.

for the spiritual uplift of millions, but not interested in the individual person, not seeing Christ in his fellow men.

"IT'S A BATTLEFIELD"

This novel, which appeared two years after Stamboul Train, considers the narrowness and shallowness in which many lives are spent.

Jim Drover, a communist worker, is sentenced to death for having killed a policeman. He is reprieved and given eighteen years imprisonment. Conrad, his brother, tried to come to the assistance of Jim's wife, Milly, and committed adultery with her. Conrad, convinced there was no justice in the world, fired a pistol at the Assistant Commissioner, was injured in a car accident, and died in hospital. The novel is an indictment of human injustice and selfishness.

> "The truth is - the Assistant Commissioner said - nobody cares about anything but his own troubles. Everybody's too busy fighting his own little battle to think of the next man" (28).

This is a story where everyone fails. Conrad Drover, the principal character, is like another Dr. Czinner who at first believes there is justice in the world but gradually convinces himself there is none, and that after being himself a total failure, must pay with his death for the general corruption of our social system. After Conrad had expired,

(28) Graham Greene, It's a Battlefield (London: Heinemann, 1956), p.217.

"consciousness returned for the fraction of a second, as if his brain had been a hopelessly shattered mirror of which one piece caught a passing light". We might compare this with what Greene says of Scobie in The Heart of the Matter:

> "Scobie strung himself to act. He dredged his consciousness up from an infinite distance in order to make some reply. He said aloud: 'Dear God, I love...' " (29)

The Assistant Commissioner resembles Scobie, but is less intelligent and religious-minded. Like Scobie he is a man of years, devoted to his work, which, he thinks, "is simply to get the right man". There is no overriding ideal governing his life, and justice for him is only a label. He is pervaded by a sense of frustration and failure.

Few of the characters in the story are Catholics, and religion as such gets little mention. We are given a glimpse of a man by the name of Jules, a Catholic who prays during Mass for Jim Drover. The Mass is celebrated by a "fat" priest who constantly repeated "the word péché, péché, péché" which "held down his sermon like so many brass tacks driven into a wood coffin" (30). The priest was already known to be a bad preacher because when he went into the pulpit "the people withered into attitudes of meekness, piety, and inattention".

Greene satirizes a common defect in the Church,

(29) The Heart of the Matter (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp.325-326.
(30) I.B., p.159.

especially in Latin countries: negative moralizing, boring repetitions and platitudes, sound and fury signifying nothing. In other novels, however, we get some fine sermons.

The Chaplain at Leeds prison is the forerunner of the priests depicted in his later novels. He is anonymous but his priesthood means everything. He is a middle aged man but "prematurely old" and pale. He was marked by cautiousness. For instance, he went to see the police without his Roman collar, he wished to hide his identity. He appeared nervous and uneasy but he was not a coward, and told the Commissioner to his face that there had been a miscarriage of justice in the Drover case. But he spoke "with interminable circumlocutions", yet he was not shy. It was the effect of fifteen years as chaplain to the prison during which he had spent much of his time breaking bad news to the relatives of the prisoners, and this was a task that demanded great tact and gentleness.

All this involvement in the sorrows of others brought the chaplain to a state of crisis. He thinks of resigning not his priesthood - because once a priest forever a priest whether exercising the ministry or not (31) - but his office as prison chaplain which was proving too burdensome for him. He had already put in writing his request to resign before he interviews the Assistant Commissioner. There is no question of giving

(31) Cfr. Decrees of Council of Trent, Session 23, canon 4.

up all priestly ministry in his case, and when he remarks to the Commissioner that a man cannot hand in his resignation to God he implies that he will still remain active as a priest but wishes to transfer to another ministerial sphere. It was a crisis of situation, not of piety or vocation as with the clergyman in The Man Within.

Moreover, Greene shows him to be a good priest. The police officer was genuinely sorry to lose him and advised him against resigning. And yet there was a flaw. The priest knew, or should have known, before ordination that the priesthood was a privileged share in the unique and eternal Priesthood of Christ (32) who offered Himself as a Victim for the redemption of the world, and therefore he would be called to share in Christ's compassion for all men. In theory and theological reflexion this was quite clear to the Leeds prison chaplain. And even in practice he had responded generously for fifteen years. But the flesh is weak. Discouragement began to take its toll. Loneliness added to his dismay. It was a crisis that is commoner to a priest's life than most people realize. It was a psychological crisis.

The main theme of It's a Battlefield, human injustice, is summed up in words spoken by the chaplain: "I can't stand human justice any longer. It's arbitrariness. It's incomprehensibility" (33). This is the burden of this deeply disturbing

(32) St. Thomas, Summa Theol., 3, q.22,a.2.
(33) I.B.,p.230.

novel. And it is characteristic of Greene to make priests the spokesmen of the truth as he sees it. He is convinced that the priests are men called by God to declare God's truth and express man's praise and petition, as mediators sharing in the supreme Mediatorship of the Incarnate Truth (34).

The chaplain knew that Conrad had for several days been in court but not been given justice. Conder dismissed the whole apportioning of blame and pardon as a mystery. "They hanged this man and pardoned that one; one embezzler was in prison, but other men of the same kind were sent to parliament" (35). But not a mystery in the sense implied by the Assistant Commissioner when he retorted to the chaplain: "I don't mean, of course, to be blasphemous, but isn't that very like, that is to say, isn't divine justice much the same?" (36), because Divine Justice is not arbitrary, however incomprehensible. And the chaplain clinched his argument with the words:

"And I have no complaint against His mercy".

(34) St. Thomas, Summa Theol., 3, q.22,a.

(35) I.B., p.39.

(36) Ibid. pp.230-231

"BRIGHTON ROCK" (37)

Published in 1938, this may be called Graham Greene's first "Catholic" novel, i.e. a novel whose leading characters are Catholics preoccupied with Catholic faith and practice, are caught up in the tensions of Grace and sin as viewed from a Catholic doctrinal standpoint, and where Catholic priests play a considerable role.

> "When a priest is a major character of Greene's, as he is in these two plays, The Potting Shed and The Living Room, as well as in The Power and the Glory, he is invariably pivotal, the character on whom the plot turns. When a priest is a minor character, as he is in Brighton Rock, The Heart of the Matter and The End of the Affair, he invariably influences the plot out of all proportion to the size of his role" (38).

Brighton Rock is the earliest of Greene's novels where the main characters, Pinkie and Rose, are portrayed as torn between the allurement of evil and saving power of Grace. And in the final and nearly the shortest chapter of the book it is a priest who provides the denouement, a priest remarkable for his tact and prudence when speaking to Rose.

The plot is as follows. Two racecourse gangs in Brighton are at loggerheads with each other. One is led by a man called Colleoni, a man of tremendous power who lives at the Cosmopolitan Hotel, wants for nothing, and calls himself "just

(37) Between It's a Battlefield and Brighton Rock Greene published England Made Me, in 1935, and A Gun for Sale, in 1936. And afterwards, in 1939, The Confidential Agent. These three novels have little or no mention of priests. In G.S. there is an accusation against a chaplain, and a few unimportant remarks about priests, but that is all.

(38) F.L.Kunkel, op.cit.p.135. When Kunkel wrote these words A Burnt-Out Case, and The Comedians had not been published.

a business man". Pinkie, a mere stripling of seventeen, heads the other faction. The police are well aware of the situation, and the Police Inspector gives a friendly tip to Pinkie to quit Brighton, because he is no match for Colleoni.

Pinkie and Rose are the two characters that seem to embody the underlying theme of the novel. They were brought up in the Catholic faith, had some sense of right and wrong, some notion of heaven and hell. But Pinkie, consumed with pride and self-ishness, might be called a failed gangster. As to his pride, "he boasted, 'It's in the blood. Perhaps when they christened me the holy water didn't take. I never howled the devil out" (39). He is like a rat that swallowed poison and runs to all holes to quench the fire burning in its entrails. "Dante merely visited hell; Pinkie comes from there". He is loveless, revenge-ful, cruel, murderous, lying, desperate, blasphemous. His em-bittered bachelorhood stems from his arrogance. "Credo in unum Satanam" seems to sum up his faith (40).

Pinkie has some sort of belief in God and in hell, perhaps even in heaven, and this shadowy belief is the tragic element in his life. He is obsessed with the idea of hell. He prays. He remembers when he used to serve at the altar as an acolyte. But this does not check him on a career of sinfulness, he reckons there will be time enough later to repent.

(39) Graham Greene, B.R., (London: Heinemann, 1959), p.169.

(40) Ibid. p.220.

So here we have a battle between the promptings of grace and of evil. In his surrender to evil he reminds one of Iago, and his remorse of conscience recalls Lady Macbeth. As a child he had vowed to become a priest. This is the first of Greene's novels that deals with a priestly vocation rejected.

At all costs Pinkie has to win through, even at the price of hatred and assassination. Hale was the first victim, and there remains a girl called Rose who knows of the murder and could betray him.

Rose is the antithesis of Pinkie. She is pure and innocent when she meets him. After he has spoken to her about love she gives herself completely: sin, suicide, hell itself, would not daunt her because of her love for him. "I'll do anything for you. Tell me what to do" (41). But Pinkie hates her.

And yet, to prevent her giving evidence against him in court, he marries her. Moreover, he wants her - perhaps because evil cannot exist in isolation from good (42). Rose herself is a mystery, so divine and yet so human. And it is love that prompts her to marry Pinkie.

Throughout the story Rose symbolizes the Voice of God calling Pinkie to repentance and salvation. It is Rose who reminds him of his faith and asks him whether he prays not to

(41) Ibid.p.169.

(42) Summa Theol., I,q.49,a.1.

die a sudden death (43). And Pinkie longs for peace of soul, but peace is not his. Rose is regarded as an obstacle to his peace, and he decides "to close her mouth one way or another; he had to have peace" (44). He then convinces Rose that the best thing for both of them is suicide. He puts a gun into her hands and tells her to shoot herself, saying he will follow her. But at that moment Ida Arnold arrives with the police, and while Pinkie screams Rose "pulled the car door open and flung the revolver far away from her towards the damp scrub" (45). She is saved, but her heart is broken with grief and despair. The man who loved her so much is dead - burnt by vitriol - and damned for ever.

Brighton Rock unfolds a continual struggle on two levels: externally between two factions of Pinkie and Colleoni to take over Brighton, internally between good and evil to take possession of the characters involved. Brighton symbolizes the outer world, the characters represent the inner man. The storm breaks and rages on the shore of Brighton and only in the last chapter is calm restored. This last chapter brings the dénouement; without it the story would have been one of pessimism and unrelieved tragedy. Pinkie's damnation would have made evil appear triumphant.

We see Rose making a confession to a priest who encourages her not to think that all is lost. He hints that

43. R.Matthews writes, op.cit.pp.202-203: "Je ne puis M'empêcher de penser qu'il y a chez Rose quelque chose d'une Marie Goretti. Je sais que la comparaison peut sembler ridicule.
44. Brighton Rock, p.153.
45. Ibid.p.326.

evil is man's extremity affording God the opportunity of total victory. Peace is re-born in the soul of Rose. The priest's words provide her with an anchor of hope. Her humility, trust, and complete commitment to others give entry to the workings of divine grace. She is the symbol of mercy and love in contrast to the personifications of violence and injustice that storm through the preceding chapters. Even Ida Arnold, who laid snares for Pinkie, personifies temptation as against Rose who represents pardon for all sinners.

Rose is kneeling down, but "she hadn't come to confess, she had come to think" (46). She has come to the priest in the confessional because she remembers where she found consolation so often in the past. She also remembers Pinkie's unwarranted self-assurance in promising himself time to repent:

> "Go to a priest. Say: 'Father, I've committed murder twice. And there was a girl - she killed herself'" (47).

And now it is a girl telling a priest there was a boy who had killed himself.

Rose has come not only to think but also to tell the priest she is in despair and wishes she had killed herself also in order to share Pinkie's damnation. She is defiant and bitterly insults the priest, but the priest is patience itself. He is to become the instrument of God's gift of pardon and

(46) Ibid. p.330.

(47) Ibid. p.306.

peace to Rose.

Anonymity surrounds this priest - "priests come and go" -, but he is very different from the clergyman in The Man Within. He is a man of experience and wisdom garnered through long years in the ministry. No less than eight times Greene refers to his advanced age. And when Rose insists that her only regret is not to have shared Pinkie's fate, he merely remarks: "Go on, my child", with imperturbable calm. To her accusation that he knows nothing about love he replies with words of encouragement and hope. He is gifted with profound insight into human nature, has a great respect for human suffering. He realizes that Pinkie never loved Rose and wanted to be rid of her. He does not say so directly, but when Rose also accuses Ida of being blind to the love between them, the priest murmurs: "Perhaps she was right".

Rose tells the priest she would have committed suicide,

> "if she hadn't been afraid that somewhere in that obscure countryside of death they might miss each other - mercy operating somehow for one and not the other";

and with great tact the priest tells her not to dismiss the hope she entertained that perhaps Pinkie was saved after all. "Judge not, that you be not judged" (48) is a universal maxim. God's judgement is very different from ours. The conscience of every man is a mystery. The mercy of God is limitless. And

(48) Matthew 7, 1.

the priest remembering his excursions into French literature, continues:

> "There was a man, a Frenchman (49), you wouldn't know about him, my child, who had the same idea as you. He was a good man, a holy man, and he lived in sin all through his life because he couldn't bear the idea that any soul could suffer damnation".

Rose pricks up her ears and lets the priest talk.

> "This man decided that if any soul was going to be damned, he would be damned too. He never took the sacraments, he never married his wife in church. I don't know, my child, but some people think he was - well, a saint. I think he died in what we are told is mortal sin - I'm not sure: it was in the war: perhaps..."

The old priest sighs and whistles and bends his head:

> "You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone - the... appalling...strangeness of the mercy of God" (50).

The priest refuses to pass sentence. Even in confession it is only the sincerity of the penitent's self-avowal and repentance that he has to judge. He is the minister of God's Mercy not the executor of His Judgement. He is right to stake all on God's Mercy. He knows the saying: "Between the stirrup and the ground he something sought and something found". His only clue is Christ's dying for the salvation of all men. "We must hope and pray"..."The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from mercy".

(49) Graham Greene speaks of "...Péguy challenging God in the cause of the damned". The Lawless Roads, ed.cit. p.6. "The priest speaks to her of Péguy, the 'sinner' who could not accept the thought that God would allow any of his creatures to suffer damnation". A.A. De Vitis, Graham Greene (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1964), p.86.

(50) Brighton Rock, p.331.

On the other hand Rose feels convinced that Pinkie is beyond redemption. He had sinned and sinned with his eyes open. The priest tells her she is right and Pinkie was wrong. He quotes the latin tag: corruptio optime pessima. "I mean", he said, "a Catholic is more capable of evil than anyone. I think perhaps - because we believe in Him - we are more in touch with the devil than other people. But we must hope", he said mechanically , "hope and pray" (51).

"Hope and pray" is like a refrain running through the priest's advice to Rose. Trust in God's love is the mark of the priest Fr. James in Greene's The Living Room.

The priest argues that if Rose is convinced that Pinkie loved her, then she could be sure there was good in him. "Even love like that?", asked Rose. "Yes", replied the priest (52).

That reply strikes home, Rose broods over it. A change comes over her. The priest asks her to return soon, to-morrow if possible. He withholds absolution for the moment. Rose promises to return:

> "Yes, Father...And if there's a baby..."

The last confidence is given and is met with the disarming remark:

> "With your simplicity and his force...Make him a saint...to pray for his father" (53).

(51) Ibid. p.332.

(52) Ibid. p.332.

(53) Ibid. p.332.

And he puts the finishing touch by saying "Pray for me, my child". "Yes, oh yes", says Rose. That tell-tale "oh" expresses her sincere and life-long gratitude, although the priest's name she saw written over the confessional "wasn't any name she remembered". When Rose listens to the gramophone record, she realizes that there was no reason to commit suicide, and that the priest had been wise telling her, "Perhaps she was right".

Brighton Rock's priest is the most perfect exemplar of the priesthood in all Greene's novels. Moreover, he is the only priest who seems to be completely successful when dealing with a difficult case.

> "A sudden feeling of immense gratitude broke through the pain - it was as if she had been given the sight a long way off of life going on again" (54).

Rose wants to live, and the only reason for suicide was that she wished to share Pinkie's fate, because he loved her. Now she knows the truth, and that Pinkie's damnation is far from certain, she also can consider herself heavenward-bound (55). That is Greene's dominant theme in the book, a theme he expresses in line with the Gospel and anticipating the solemn words of the recent Vatican Council:

> "God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts; for that reason He forbids us to make judgements about the internal guilt of anyone" (56)

.....

(54) Ibid. p.332.

(55) "Après cela, ce que l'on avait voulu faire, c'était dessiner un personnage dont tout le monde aurait dit qu'il était désigné pour être damné, et laisser le lecteur se demander s'il ne pouvait pas être sauvé malgré tout". R.Matthews, op.cit. p.197.

(56) Walter M. Abbott, S.J., The Documents of Vatican II (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p.227.

In the novels written before The Power and the Glory Greene depicts a variety of priests with increasing wealth of detail and, it seems, with a growing admiration. He signifies quite decidedly his preference for those priests who show understanding and respect for human suffering, like the Leeds prison chaplain in It's a Battlefield and the wise old confessor in Brighton Rock; whereas he pours scorn on those who are devoid of this quality.

All the priests described by Greene are tremendously real, each with his mannerisms, his personal struggles, his way of dealing with other people. They are drawn from real life and meet us at every bend and turn if we move in ecclesiastical circles. Some are men who to all appearances are happy in their calling, others are in the throes of a crisis either spiritual of situational. They are mostly anonymous who "come and go" but leave their mark, sometimes indelibly, in the souls of the few who approach them from the depths of distress.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

CHAPTER FOUR

T H E P O W E R A N D T H E G L O R Y

INTRODUCTION

The Power and the Glory appeared in 1940, one year after a travel book entitled The Lawless Roads, also by Graham Greene. The author informs us that the source-material of the former is to be found in the latter (1).

The title of the novel is taken from an old Greek doxology which for many centuries was added to the Lord's Prayer, and as such was preserved in the Anglican Liturgy (2).

The plot is very simple. In Tabasco, one of the states of the Republic of Mexico, near Guatemala, a terrible religious persecution breaks out, with the result that nearly all the priests escape to other states where they can still exercise the ministry with some degree of freedom. Of the few that remained in Tabasco all but two were arrested and shot. The two remaining priests are the anonymous "whisky priest" (3), and Padre José. Padre José openly conformed to the Governor's

(1) Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads (London: Heinemann, 1955) p.131.
(2) In the revised Catholic Liturgy (Roman rite) this doxology has been re-introduced as an acclamation by the people after the "embolism" that follows immediately on the Lord's Prayer.
(3) In this study I shall constantly use this nickname "whisky priest" to differentiate him from other clergy. In his travel book Greene often speaks about several bishops and priests, among whom he mentions a certain Padre Rey "who lived with his wife and daughter", and another priest who "was just what we call - said Dr. Fitzpatrick - a whisky priest". These two coalesce in Greene's creation of his whisky priest with an illegitimate daughter.

ruling that all priests must marry. The "whisky priest" continues to exercise the priestly office surreptitiously "for eight hard hopeless years", always in danger of being caught and executed. And this is what eventually happens. A police lieutenant hunts him down and, after a night in prison, the priest is shot in the prison courtyard, not, as was customary, in the cemetery, in order to avoid a public demonstration. The news of his execution, however, soon leaks out, and the whole town is profoundly disturbed.

The book is divided into four parts, the first three containing four chapters each, the last part a single chapter. In the first we are introduced to the whisky priest, the last remaining priest in Tabasco, apart from Padre José, trying to escape to Vera Cruz, but missing the boat. In the second part of the novel we see him return to his native village six years later where he meets his bastard daughter, Brigitta, who is seven years old. He does not get the welcome he had hoped to receive, and while he is celebrating Mass the police arrive, and he narrowly escapes capture. Back in Tabasco he is arrested for violating the anti-liquor laws - he was trying to get altar wine - but his identity remained unknown. In the third part, after his release, and while endeavouring once again to cross the border into another state, he is called to minister to a dying American gangster. He is convinced it is a trap, but obeys the call of duty, and when he arrives at the gangster's

hut he finds the lieutenant awaiting him. He is arrested and subsequently shot. In the fourth part we are told of the effect his execution has on the various characters associated with him in the story, and of the halo that surrounds his memory.

It is the story of the Passion and Death of a priest who, with all his faults and failings, remains close to Christ both in his ministry and in the depths of his soul. It is the Power of Christ the High Priest working through the brittle vessel of the poor whisky priest, and it is the Glory of the Risen Christ that enfolds him in his martyrdom.

The Power and the Glory is a story that revolves round a remarkable priest and gathers up Greene's profound insight into the Catholic priesthood. It is from this angle that the present study takes its bearings.

Environment, both physical and spiritual, plays a capital role in our understanding of the central character, the whisky priest. Tabasco is "the godless state" with an enervating climate and almost unbearable living conditions. In The Lawless Roads Greene constantly refers to the terrific heat and merciless blazing sky. "Every ten minutes", he says, "I tried to dry myself with a towel" (4). In the first chapter alone he mentions the suffocating heat ~~and~~ as many as eighteen times. Phrases like "the merciless sky", "the burnt plaza", "the baked street", "the bloody land", "the heat and the forgetting" convey

(4) Graham Greene, L.R., p.131.

an impression of overwhelming evil and hostility. Loss of memory is a major affliction. Psychologically and socially as well as physically, the atmosphere is most depressing.

It is within this context that Greene places the whisky priest and his priestly ministry. He wants us to understand what a tremendous effort of mind and body is called for. He wants us to appreciate the priest's sterling worth in spite of his human failings. One of these failings is a weakness for strong drink, and that in a state that professes to be atheistic where "no intoxicant is allowed but beer, and beer costs a peso a bottle - a ruinous price in Mexico" (5). No wonder the nervous system is constantly on the verge of a break-down, there is a weakening of will-power, and responsibility for one's actions steadily diminishes. Loss of energy, loss of memory... almost loss of personality.

Greene also emphasizes the violence of the elements as a background to danger or death threatening the priest. When, for example, the Jefe, the Governor's cousin and the beggar greedily consume the wine that the priest had purchased for Mass only after endangering his own safety, "lightning filled the windows like a white sheet, and thunder crashed suddenly overhead" (6). And only two pages later in the novel he says:

(5) Ibid. p.128.

(6) Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory (London: Heinemann, 1961), p.145. - All references will be quoted from this edition. Words in inverted commas without page references also refer to this edition.

"The lightning shot down over the harbour and the thunder beat on the roof: this was the atmosphere of a whole state". These and other similar phrases describe the physical atmosphere of Tabasco but are charged with symbolic meaning.

The spiritual environment is still more disheartening. The whole state is in the grip of hatred, violence, moral misery, corrupt authority, religious persecution, and a bitter sense of abandonment. "It was as if a man in all this state had been left to man" (7). A former patient of Mr. Tench the dentist meets him in the street but "just stares malevolently up at him"; the lieutenant "stands in his monastic cell with his polished boots and his venom". Hatred is directed above all at the priest. It is necessary "to be rid of those people for ever". Violence is personified, the police "carry their rights on their hips", and in order to track down the priest they take hostages from every village, and shoot them if they do not report and help in the pursuit.

When the priest is put in gaol for a breach of the anti-liquor laws he sees himself surrounded by moral degradation. The Chief of Police is living immorally with a girl who had previously lived with another man. Children are corrupted from their tender years. Even the sweet English girl, Coral, who befriends the priest and shelters him from his pursuivants, at

(7) Ibid. p.195.

the age of ten speaks as though she had no Christian belief. Brigitta, the whisky priest's illegitimate child, is prematurely malicious: the worst of the world is "in her heart already, like the small spot of decay in a fruit" (8).

In The Lawless Roads we are told that "Private houses were searched for religious emblems, and prison was the penalty for possessing them" (9). One of the peasants brought before the lieutenant in chapter two of the novel is fined five pesos for "wearing a holy medal under his shirt". Religious persecution is the background to the whole story, and the plot concerns the hunting down of the last priest who defies Government orders for the sake of his conscience. The persecutors are said to have "shot him half a dozen times", so elusive is their quarry. Their aim is to obliterate God's image from the earth. The priest is reckoned to be the only dangerous man to the state, compared with him the gringo bank robber and murderer "does no real harm", for after all, ponders the lieutenant, "we all have to die, and somebody has to spend the money". The priest tells the lieutenant to his face: "It's God you're against" (10).

What Greene said about Villa-hermosa:

> "One felt one was drawing near to the centre of something - if it was only of darkness and abandonment"

(8)Ibid.p.102.
(9) L.R., p.129.

(10) P.G., p.251.

is true of Tabasco. This feeling of abandonment pervades the whole novel. The word itself is used about twenty times and every character in the novel seems to suffer this torture: Mr. Tench, the parents of Luis, Brigitta, and especially the priest who feels rejected even by "the cold faces of the Saints". The words of Christ on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (11) epitomize the greater part of the story.

(11) Matthew 27:46.

I: THE PRIEST AS A MAN

The theological principle that grace does not destroy but perfects human nature is exemplified in all men, but particularly in the priest. In the first chapter we are introduced to the man, to a baffling character intent on running away, to a hounded creature "of unstable hilarity" who tries to evade questioning, who talks little about himself. We are not told his name nor where he comes from. The only thing we learn is that he wants to catch the boat to Vera Cruz, that he is anxious to know whether there will be any ports of call on the way, and that although he eventually decides to miss the boat he feels terribly disappointed.

He is referred to throughout the book as "the stranger", especially in the first chapter where the epithet is used no less than eighteen times. Only later are we informed he is a priest on the run. Thus Greene symbolizes how a priest is "in the world, but not of it". As many as seventeen times Greene uses expressions denoting sadness in the priest. His hilarity is unstable; a dying woman is no more dying than he is; when he speaks he does so "with monstrous bitterness"; he calls himself a servant of the devil or a damned man; he openly confesses he is frightened, that he cannot bear his sorrows any longer; he breaks out into weeping for sheer exhaustion when asked to hear confessions before the police arrive, and when

his precious altar wine is snatched from him and drunk before his very eyes by those who did not understand the use he meant to put it to (12). He dreams of his daughter, and wakes up crying.

The priest's sadness sometimes touches the fringes of despair, as when he seems to hear a voice echoing everywhere that he is totally useless and can do no good. He goes to the bedside of a dying woman, led by a child, but he feels "unworthy of the power he carries" of forgiving sins, and he prays: "Let me be caught soon... Let me be caught" (13). He often longs for death, and even calls the policemen fools for not succeeding in arresting him. He accuses himself of having given way to despair five years previously, but had since overcome it, and yet, when he hears the police are taking hostages from the villages in order to enlist their co-operation in his arrest, he is very near despair. He fights with a bitch over a bone, and in his sadness he says: "it would have been better, quicker, if he had been recognized in the police station a week ago" (14). On one occasion he gave his name to a stranger - there seemed no purpose in continuing to live (15). Hearing himself called "Father" on his arrival at a village, he decides to surrender if he has been seen. While saying Mass in the farm-house of the Lehrs he recalls a curious dream from which he had woken "with the sense of complete despair". He is torn

(12) Ibid. p.49.
(13) Ibid. p.18.
(14) Ibid. p.183.
(15) Ibid. p.205.

between surrender and courage to keep going, despair and hope; but in spite of it all he maintains his trust in God. On the last night before his execution "his head drooped between his knees ; he looked as if he had abandoned everything, and been abandoned" (16).

We wonder why the stranger is so sad. Certainly, he has been on the run for eight years, hungry and thirsty, deprived of sleep, his nervous energy draining away; but he is a priest and it seems to him that "the eight hard hopeless years" were but a caricature of service: "a few communicants, a few confessions, and an endless bad example" (17). Physical suffering and remorse of conscience combine with the implacable climate of Tabasco to make him a saddened, embittered man.

This sense of universal dereliction is heightened by Greene's description of his physical appearance, which is one of unrelieved wretchedness. The trousers of his black city suit are torn, his shoes are beyond repair; he walks almost barefoot; his hair and his stubby beared are whitening, his shoulders sloping or hunched. He has protruding eyeballs, his teeth are in complete decay. "Hollow" is the adjective that Greene uses several times: "hollow man", "hollow face", "hollow features", more than "little" and "small". After being shot he is described as "a routine heap beside the wall - something unimportant" which has to be cleared away. But from that

(16) Ibid. p.267.

(17) Ibid. p.271.

hollowness will come fulness, and around that "routine heap", after its burial, people will gather to proclaim the power and the glory of a humble man.

.....

The whisky priest considers himself the most contemptible man in the state of Tabasco. And human failings he had. He admits that pride was the forerunner of his downfall (18). When he learns that he is the only active priest left in the state he begins to think himself superior to those who have run away. He compares his pride to that of the fallen angels (19) and numbers himself among them. He confesses that he made his own rules and appointed himself his own judge. He became self-centred. He did not fast or pray. He often neglected to say Mass because the altar-stone "was too dangerous to carry with him". He gradually gave up saying the breviary, and one day left it behind.

Unfortified by prayer and the daily Mass, he succumbed to weariness. Unable to consult with or confess to another priest, he became like a rudderless boat. At the mercy of a cruel climate, his powers of resistance were at a low ebb. He began to take strong drink to quench his thirst and to summon up the appearances of courage, and then one day, while drunk and

(18) Ibid. p.254.

(19) Ibid. pp.168-169.

lonely, he made love to a woman. His own words deserve quoting:

> "That other priest was right. It was then when he left I began to go to pieces. One thing went after another. I got careless about my duties. I began to drink. It would have been much better, I think, if I had gone too. Because pride was at work all the time. Not love of God". He sat bowed on the packing-case, a small plump man in Mr. Lehr's cast-off clothes. He said, "Pride was what made the angels fall. Pride's the worst thing of all. I thought I was a fine fellow to have stayed when others had gone. And then I thought I was so grand I could make my own rules. I gave up fasting, daily Mass. I neglected my prayers - and one day because I was drunk and lonely - well, you know how it was, I got a child. It was all pride. Just pride because I'd stayed. I wasn't any use. I'd got so that I didn't have a hundred communicants a month. If I'd gone I'd have given God twelve times that number. It's a mistake one makes - to think just because a thing is difficult and dangerous " (20).

The priest analyses his spiritual decline, its causes and effects. Once routine sets in, everything withers. "The routine of his life like a dam was cracked, and forgetfulness came dribbling in, wiping out this and that" (21).

This was the priest's self-judgement on the eve of his death, after his soul had been purified in the crucible of long suffering. He is over-severe with himself. Most of the faults he accuses himself of were not real shortcomings at all, they were consequences of circumstances over which he had no control. The obligations he left unfulfilled are mostly ecclesiastical laws that in circumstances like his have no binding force. His pride perhaps was real, but he soon overcame it. His lack of ritual or formal prayer was replaced by informal personal

(20) Ibid. p.254.

(21) Ibid. p.73.

communion with God in all his trials.

Without this deep awareness of God and a continual supplication for God's grace, it would not be possible to continue his priestly ministry in the teeth of such bitter persecution and in defiance of the Governor's law that priestsshould marry. It would have been so easy to conform and receive a Government pension as a state functionary. But he preferred to be rejected, despised, hunted down. He preferred the way of martyrdom.

His drunkenness and his intercourse with Maria seem to be his major blemishes and very serious sins. Later on we shall discuss the sinfulness the priest incurred in matters of sex; here let us consider his drinking.

The people nickname him the "whisky priest". Strong drink was the only sedative accessible to a mysterious stranger with a load of sadness in his heart. Brandy provides also a link for dealing in a friendly manner with the people he meets. "If we could sit down... we could open the brandy", he says to Mr. Tench (22), who was also longing for a drink. He wants to forget, and in drink he finds an escape. He is aware of this weakness. He calls himself "a whisky priest", having heard other people call him so. "You have a name for me. Oh, I've heard you use it before now. I'm a whisky priest" (23). When thinking about those who sacrifice themselves for his sake as a priest, he remembers with shame his own indulgence. Luis'

(22) Ibid. p.10.

(23) Ibid. p.164.

mother is the first to use the nickname. Luis' younger sister remarks that the priest "smells funny" (24). His craving for strong drink prompts him continually to say to people he meets: "If you would do me a favour... A little brandy" (25). Some people, like Captain Fellows, are not impressed by a religion whose priests go around begging for brandy. Padre José's wife calls him a drunkard. And yet the persecuting lieutenant, although a teetotaller himself, sympathizes with the priest's weakness and secretly brings him some brandy (26).

This addiction to brandy was a weakness that thrived on the physical and spiritual conditions in which the priest tried to exercise his ministry, but the main consideration is that the priest did not allow himself to be deterred from his priestly aims by these appalling conditions. In the first pages of the novel we find him letting the boat go to Verz Cruz without him. He grumbles, but he is aware of an over-riding responsibility to his scattered flock. He tells Mr. Tench, the English dentist: "I shall miss it, I am meant to miss it. Give me my brandy" (27). He feels the tragedy of his situation, the exigencies of his priestly vocation, and he needs every help, both material and moral, to regain his courage. And so he says to young Coral: "A little drink will work wonders in a cowardly man. With a little brandy, why, I'd defy - the devil" (28). He is ready

(24) Ibid. p.29.
(25) Ibid. p.43.
(26) Ibid. p.267.
(27) Ibid. p.14.
(28) Ibid. p.

to share his last drop even with a man he knows may betray him. To the half-caste who wants to take him to the dying gangster, where the police are waiting, he says: "I think a little drink will do us both good. We both need courage, don't we?" (29). When entering the hut he has to knot his hands behind his back to stop trembling, because he knows he has fallen into the trap. He is glad to help the dying American - "but all the same you needed to be a little drunk to die", he afterwards commented. He needs the juice of the grape both to go on bringing about the Presence of Christ in the Mass, and for his own physical survival.

Any severe shock arouses in him a craving for drink. When thrown into prison and made to witness gross moral depravity he longs for a drink more than anything else, but that does not stop him from behaving with heroic selflessness towards his fellow prisoners. When he feels safer and more at ease he controls his appetite, such as when at the Lehrs' house where he could get all the brandy he wanted, but orders only three bottles, which, he says, will be his last. He promises to give up drink as soon as he crosses the border:

> "He told himself - in time it will be all right. I shall pull up, I only ordered three bottles this time. They will be the last I'll ever drink, I won't need drink there" (30).

Before the religious persecution, when in La Concepción, he "wasn't used to drink", and only once did he drink "just a

(29) Ibid. p.239.
(30) Ibid. p.221.

little too much" at a dinner given "in honour of the tenth anniversary of his ordination" (31).

Now we come to the most serious result of his excessive drinking: his illegitimate daughter.

As Greene depicts her, she is precocious and contaminated with the corruption around her. The is the priest's obsessional concern and his greatest torment. He regretted that lustful action - "once for five minutes" - with Maria for the rest of his days, and seven years later "he alone carried a wound, as though a whole world had died" (32). When he faces death he could be happy "if he had left nothing behind him across the range except a few bad memories" (33), but he leaves a daughter, the fruit of fear and brandy, not of love. That girl is his spiritual martyrdom preparing him to face the firing squad. She is his penance for a moment of weakness. Her very waywardness and complete indifference towards her father are instrumental in making him more perfectly her father in God by his prayer and suffering for her sake.

The priest accuses himself of pride, envy, and lack of charity (34). His pride is his continual worry. He confesses his pride to Padre José, to the lieutenant, and to his fellow prisoners. He also owns up to cowardice and ingratitude (35).

(31) Ibid. p.117.
(32) Ibid. p.85.
(33) Ibid. p.225.
(34) Ibid. pp.112, 270, etc.
(35) Ibid. pp.112 and 252.

He reproaches himself for his ambition and worldly aspirations when he was a young priest (36). And even later he avows that he gave in to covetousness (37).

What are we to say of these self-reproaches? We must remember that his fundamental loyalty to his priesthood and to the people under his care is the reason for the eight hopeless years he has been on the run, and that such suffering has purified his soul making him acutely more and more sensitive to his own shortcomings, perhaps even to the point of scrupulosity. He may well have felt the promptings of pride seeing most of his fellow priests escape from persecution, especially when he remembered the words of Christ: "If anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven" (38); but perhaps later on he recalled other words, also of Jesus: "If they persecute you in one town, take refuge in the next; and if they persecute you in that, take refuge in another" (39). So it was largely a matter of personal interpretation, and he was not the one to sit in judgement on his fellow priests.

Envy, sloth, and uncharitable gossip are no strangers to clerical circles, but the whisky priest shows himself remarkably free of these vices. Ambition for ecclesiastical preferment is

(36) Ibid. p.121.
(37) Cfr. L.R., p.200.
(38) Matthew 10:32.
(39) Matthew 10:23

a two-edged sword; one side is authentic striving for scope to spread the word and love of God; the other is self-regarding and destructive of the spirit. There is a saying among priests that even if mitres rained down from heaven, they would not reach the ground - clerical heads would pop up to catch them! Only after a while is the mitre felt to burn like a crown of thorns. The hero of the novel, far from seeking honours and preferment - which in times of persecution are an absurdity - goes the way of self-identification with "publicans and sinners", and, although feeling himself a stranger, tries to approach people on a footing of equality and understanding.

In this section headed The Priest as a Man I have wanted to emphasize that aspect of the whisky priest which belongs to all fallen humanity and comes within the province of ordinary human psychology, but a psychology open to and enriched by that more-than-human factor we call the "grace of God". The faults and failings, both real and imaginary, of which the priest is deeply conscious give the clue to the priest's own damaging verdict of himself when he says sincerely and devastatingly: "I am a bad priest" (40). In the next section we shall see how God's power works through human weakness.

II. THE MAN AS A PRIEST

As soon as we are introduced to the whisky priest in

(40) P.G., p.248.

The Power and the Glory - although we are not told who he is - we are somehow attracted towards him, despite his failings. He is what we nowadays call "a character" in the sense of an impressive personality. He incarnates Greene's thesis that when God seems most absent He is present. There is something in this man that defies psychological analysis, and yet he is a real and complete man. In other words, he is possessed of natural and supernatural qualities that make him instrumental in the hands of God for the work of redemption among men.

First of all, he is a polite man. Not a single phrase uttered by him is cheap and vulgar; courtesy is his second nature. When Mr. Tench shows him his dental surgery room he sees how primitive it is, he has a word of praise for every-thing: "Very fine. The window is very beautiful". And when he is told that the dentist's son had died in England, he com-bines sympathy with the reflection: "Oh, well; .. in a Christ-ian country" (41). Even when he gets a fit of hiccups, he tries not to discomfort others (42). When he sees his precious altar wine consumed, he remonstrates with words of double meaning but politely, saying he was very anxious to take a little wine back for his mother. He begs Miss Lehr not to awaken her brother to bid him good-bye, but asks her to thank him for his hospitality.

Gratitude is a sign of a noble heart, and the whisky priest is grateful for any little favour. He is grateful to Mr. Tench

(41) Ibid. p.11.

(42) Ibid. p.142.

for allowing him to rest in the shade, although he had shared his own brandy with the dentist (43). He thanks Coral in his dream for teaching him the morse code (44); thanks the lieutenant for letting him stay alone with the dying gangster, although he knows the officer will soon shoot him. He tells the lieutenant what a good man he is because he gave him money after the priest's first imprisonment. He thanks him for listening (45). He thanks the gangster for not confessing his sins when such a confession might have led to the priest's discovery (46). One of his heaviest burdens is that of gratitude to everyone (47).

The priest is a man of understanding, even though he may not share the opinions of others. When Mr. Lehr, a Lutheran, asks him whether he minds plain speech as a Christian among Christians, the priest persistently reassures him: "Of course. I like to hear..." (48). He tells the officer he is acting in good conscience even when opposing the Church, and tells him he has nothing to fear. The pious woman he meets in prison is perhaps the most unpleasant character in the story, but even she is given the benefit of the doubt. The half-caste traitor deserves the reward of seven hundred pesos, he thinks, for all his trouble in trying to betray him (49). Everyone finds in the priest an open heart and an understanding mind. He simply cannot apportion blame to anyone but himself.

(43) Ibid. p.15.
(44) Ibid. p.272.
(45) Ibid. p.255.
(46) Ibid. p.245.
(47) Ibid. p.101.
(48) Ibid. p.209.
(49) Ibid. p.127.

"Can you blame me?"
"No, no. It would be the last thing I would do" (50).

His sense of duty as a priest is the road that leads him to his death. He is almost obsessed with this sense of duty, and any failure in this regard is an endless source of remorse. Carelessness about his duties is the first of a long list of sins he confesses to the lieutenant (51). He accuses himself of failing in his duty when he tries to escape leaving the woman alone with the dead child (52). And yet he tells Coral it is his duty not to be caught because he is in his own parish. He wonders whether the bath he takes at the Lehr's house is not a waste of time; after all, he wryly remarks: "Sweat cleans you as effectively as water". Only once does he admit he has a sense of duty, and that was when the officer expresses surprise that he would return, and he replies:

> "Oh well, lieutenant, you know how it is. Even a coward has a sense of duty" (53).

He is hounded everywhere by his sense of duty unfulfilled. The feeling of utter frustration and failure stems from his stern sense of duty. He also has a sense of discipline and sees himself as an example of what a lack of it can lead to. As he remarks to the German Mr. Lehr:

> "Discipline is necessary. Drills may be no good in battle, but they form the character. Otherwise you get - well, people like me... people like me", he repeated with fury (54).

(50) Ibid. p.133.
(51) Ibid. p.254.
(52) Ibid. p.203.
(53) Ibid. p.246.
(54) Ibid. pp. 209-210.

His naturally human love for people is wide and deep, but his own daughter is most profoundly enshrined in his affections. Later we shall see how concerned he was for her eternal salvation. For the present suffice it to say that she was one of the two idées fixes in his mind, the other being the idea of his failure as a priest. This is indicated when, at Coral's abandoned house, he picks up a book of poems and reads with great emotion some verses ending with the line:

"My daughter, O my daughter" (55),

a line that echoes throughout the story. The first chapter in the second part of the book - the longest chapter in the book - is a tragic lament of the priest over his daughter. It seems that the natural love of the man and the supernatural love of the priest are fused into one great crucifixion of this sensitive man. He

> "was aware of an immense load of responsibility:
> it was indistinguishable from love" (56).

Perhaps it was because he sees her sickly and feeble - her body is like a dwarf's - or perhaps because he sees her completely abandoned - she is only a bastard - his love for her is boundless. Confronted with her contempt for him he can only protest vehemently:

> "I love you. I am your father and I love you.
> Try to understand" (57)

He tries to kiss her, but she recoils and shrieks at him.

(55) Ibid. p.191.
(56) Ibid. p.181.
(57) Ibid. p.103.

He uses the tenderest words to attract her, but she taunts him and tells him he is not even a man, and is no good for any woman. She mocks at him, pokes her tongue out at him (58). It is a fearful battle between love and hate. He is ready to defend her against the whole world, even against her own mother (59). And when he has to escape north into the mountains, his heart "is shaken by the conviction of loss" to think of her left without protection, without grace, without charm to plead for her. As long as he lives the memory of his daughter will go with him; whenever he hears the word "bastard" the sword of sorrow will pierce him anew. When he reproaches priests for advising a bastard to hate her own father, he is thinking of his own. He says,

> "The sin was over. It was their duty to teach - well, love" (60).

Accompanying all these virtues in the priest is a lively sense of humour and wit. Circumstances are hardly propitious for its display, and yet it occasionally breaks out and reveals the quickness of his mind. For example, when a woman tells him she has four children to be baptized because it is three years since a priest was in the village, he tells her it's rather a lot of children in three years (61). Another woman comes to confession but, having nothing to confess, she begins talking

(58) Ibid. p.83, and p.103.
(59) Ibid. pp. 83-84.
(60) Ibid. p.161.
(61) Ibid. p.215.

about her fish supply and her last night's sleep; and the priest pleads with her to leave quickly and make room for real sinners (62). During his long talk with the half-caste on the way to the dying gangster he uses his sense of irony to show the half-caste that both of them are perfectly aware of the trap he is walking into (63).

The priest is an educated man, he spent six years at a seminary in the United States, speaks good English, and his conversation is always in good taste. Mr. Tench, (64), the lieutenant (65), and even the half-caste (66) are soon aware they are talking to an educated man. He looks forward to the day when he reaches Las Casas, "a city with churches, a university" (67). He carries with him not only the "birthmark" of the priesthood but also the distinctive features of a man of education.

He is also a man of keen intelligence. He retains alertness of mind even when physically and morally exhausted. His dialogue with his fellow prisoners is brisk, logical, and full of common sense. When somebody says it is better not to believe and to be a brave man, he replies it is very difficult not to believe that the Governor, the Jefe, or the prison exist. And when another prisoner answers that nobody could say that the prison is not a prison, he retorts:

> "No? You don't think so? I can see you don't listen to the politicians" (68)

(62) Ibid.p.223.
(63) Ibid.p.238.
(64) Ibid. p.18.
(65) Ibid. p.256.
(66) Ibid. p.104.
(67) Ibid. p.208.
(68) Ibid. p.163.

He sustains a long and theological discourse about poverty and the poor with the lieutenant. When the latter denies the existence of miracles and asks the priest whether he believes in them, the priest answers: "Yes. But not for me" and then goes on to distinguish between the existence of miracles and the reluctance of men of science to use the word "miracle" and their tendency to fall back on the contention that science has enlarged our conception of what life is, and thus disproved miracles (69).

His mental clarity serves his purpose of self-analysis. He traces step by step what he thinks is his spiritual decline and fall. What he abhors is spiritual drifting or routine. He realizes that man is seldom presented "suddenly with two courses to follow: one good and one bad" (70). Things come gradually, and when one is aware of the need to make a drastic decision, if routine has set in there is a lack of will power to resolve or there is ignorance of the issues at stake. When he analyzes his reasons for staying in Tabasco while other priests fled, he puts it down to pride. "This was pride, devilish pride" (71). But, however mixed his motives seven years earlier, he lived long enough to learn humility along the path of constant humiliation.

In the exercise of his ministry, especially when hearing confessions, he is a man of spiritual discernment. Illicit love, he tells a penitent, breeds more unhappiness than anything

(69) Ibid. p.260.
(70) Ibid. p.253.
(71) Ibid. p.121.

else in the world, because it means the loss of God. He tells another that he has done enough penance for his sins because he has suffered enough (72). To another he enjoins for his penance the five joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.

What of his reluctance to die a martyr? He is torn between a desire to be caught and his realization that he should not presume on God's special grace required for martyrdom. Time and again he makes it clear that it is his job not to let his persecutors catch him (73), although, when the lieutenant assembles the people of the priest's native village in order to select hostages, the priest offers himself on the score that "he is getting too old to be much good in the fields". He even makes it easier for people to identify him as the priest they are looking for by keeping his eyes cast down lest he sees his informant (74). He even tells the people their job is to give him up (75). And yet later on he tells them there is no need to inform on him, which would be a sin. In every case he is motivated by the love of his people, and wishes to spare them further suffering on his account.

The sermon he preaches in his native village expresses in the simplest and the most telling way his idea of happiness and suffering. He uses comparisons familiar to theologians

(72) Ibid. p.222.
(73) Ibid. p.97.
(74) Ibid. p.96.
(75) Ibid. p.97.

but within the understanding of the poor people (76): in heaven there is no fear or insecurity, there is no growing old, the crops never fail; and then he continues:

> "Oh, it is easy to say all the things there will not be in heaven; what there is is God. That is more difficult. Our words are made to describe what we know with our senses. We say 'light', but we are thinking only of the sun; 'love'..." (77).

In spite of the difficulty in concentrating when danger dogs one's heels, the priest enters into deep reflections when speaking of God, using the via negationis. (78). He reasons with the lieutenant about love and God:

> "That's another thing altogether - God is love... God is love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn't it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark. Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around" (79).

The most theological passage in the novel is possibly that where the priest reflects upon the image of God. He argues we have to see God's image in every man, no matter how sinful and abject he may appear to us. This was the secret of the Saints, especially of those like St. Vincent de Paul who pioneered such wonderful works for the uplift of the human race in its sickness and sinfulness. The whisky priest recalls the Carmen cemetery where his parents were buried. The crosses and statues have been smashed by frenzied mobs, by people whose aim is to

(76) Cfr. St. Thomas, Summa Theol. I, q.4, art.3.
(77) P.G., p. 87.
(78) "Sed quia de Deo scire non possumus quid sit sed quid non sit, non possumus considerare de Deo quomodo sit, sed potius quomodo non sit" (St. Thomas, S. Th. I q.3, in introductione quaestionis).
(79) P.G., p.259.

obliterate the idea of God from the earth. But that is impossible, because each man bears the image of God in himself, however radiant or defaced, and to destroy that image would mean destroying every human being. Whereas in times of peace the priest would point to parents as the best examples of "what God is like" for children, now he sees God in "the policeman, the criminal, the priest, the maniac, and the judge" (80) as well as in human parenthood. He reflects:

> "Something resembling God dangled from the gibbet or went into attitudes before the bullets in a prison yard, or contorted itself like a camel in the attitudes of sex... and God's image shook now, up and down on the mule's back, with the yellow teeth sticking out over the lower lip, and God's image did its despairing act of rebellion with Maria in the hut among the rats" (81).

A priest who could discern the presence and love of God in every man, no matter how revolting and vile, has indeed risen to a high degree of contemplative insight. And the logical conclusion of this is that since God became incarnate in man, to get rid of God it is not enough to smash crosses and statues, one would have to exterminate the human race entirely:

> "If God had been like a toad, you could have rid the globe of toads, but when God was like yourself, it was no good being content with stone figures - you had to kill yourself among the graves" (82).

Many books have set out this idea in theory (83), but to put it into practice creates a tremendous difficulty; and yet

(80) Ibid. p.129. (81) Ibid. p.129. (82) Ibid. p.130.
(83) "Manifestum est autem quod in homine invenitur aliqua Dei similitudo, quae deducitur a Deo sicut ab exemplari; non tamen est similitudo secundum aequalitatem, quia in infinitum excedit exemplar hoc tale exemplatum. Et ideo in homine dicitur esse imago Dei, non tamen perfecta, sed imperfecta". (St. Thomas: Summa Theol. I, q.93, art.1).

this is the authentic basis of brother love; and this, as we shall see, was the whisky priest's secret of his sublime charity:

> "Loving God isn't any different from love of a man - or a child. It's wanting to be with Him, to be near Him". He made a hopeless gesture with his hands. "It's wanting to protect Him from yourself" (84).

The priest knows well the principles of moral theology - he tells the lieutenant he is quite aware of the steps and decisions that have led him to his present condition - but throughout the book we see him on the horns of a dilemma: shall he escape? shall he stay? If he escapes to another part of the country he will meet other priests, he will make his confession and regain the grace of God, and he will no longer be a bad example to the people he leaves behind, especially the children. But if he, the last remaining active priest, stays, at least Christ will remain sacramentally among his people, Christ's body and blood will continue to nourish. "He was shaken with the enormity of the problem" (85). He resolves to stay.

Individual cases call for different solutions. For example, when the half-caste calls him to minister to the dying gangster and shows him as evidence a scrap of paper on which was written in English: "For Christ's sake, Father..." (86). The priest guessed there was a trap laid for him, but there seemed no doubt that the gangster was actually dying, and the charity of Christ urges him to comply with the request fictitious or sincere.

(84) P.G., p.223.
(85) Ibid. p.80.
(86) Ibid. p.232.

He openly declared several times that he was a priest (87), though he knew it could easily bring him to his death. What mattered was the good of souls. He told Coral there is never any good reason for renouncing one's faith (88), but he also realizes, with regard to religious observances, that laws are made for men, not men for laws. If he was not able to fast, then a man must eat (89).

The foregoing are examples to show that the whisky priest was endowed with the natural qualities and attainments his priestly ministry demanded of him.

The supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity constitude the essence of the Christian way of life, and need to be shown forth in a specially arresting manner by a worthy priest.

FAITH is perhaps the one great common denominator of all the priests depicted by Graham Greene in his novels and plays. They are not always holy or pious or successful or humanly attractive, but they are man of supernatural faith, staunch believers in God, in God's mercy for sinners, in the possibility of eternal damnation, in God's intervention through miracles.

To-day we are witnessing even among priests a crisis of faith. As David P. O'Neill writes:

> "This loss of faith is important - the priest is nothing if he is not a believer" (90).

(87) Ibid. p.133.

(88) Ibid. p.47.

(89) Ibid. p.222.

(90) David P. O'Neill, The Priest in Crisis (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p.195.

Without faith, hope and charity wither away. And the moral virtue that protects and fosters these three virtues is humility.

Now when we consider the priest hero in The Power and the Glory we see a man of deep faith which constantly inspires his actions and gives meaning to his sufferings. Everything around him seems to disintegrate, and inwardly even his own personality, but at the core of his being is faith. The tragedy of this man is the fierce tension he experiences between this unshakable faith and his conviction that he is in the state of mortal sin and unable to get out of it. When the lieutenant quotes from memory part of the Creed he learned as a child he remarks to the priest: "You don't believe much in that, do you?" the answer was abrupt:

> "Oh yes, I believe", the little man said obstinately (91).

And when the lieutenant again questions his faith:

> "Listen", the priest said earnestly, leaning forward in the dark, pressing on a cramped foot, "I'm not as dishonest as you think I am. Why do you think I tell people out of the pulpit that they're in danger of damnation if death catches them unawares? I'm not telling them fairy stories I don't believe myself (92).

When young but precocious Coral suggests to the priest in hiding that he "could renounce", he simply fails to understand her; and when she explains, he replies:

> "It's impossible. There's no way. I'm a priest. It's out of my power (93).

(91) P.G., p.268.
(92) Ibid. p.259.
(93) Ibid. p.47.

The staccato expression stresses not so much the priest's possession of faith as the faith's possession of the priest. And yet his feelings seem all at variance with his belief. His faith and hope in man has died; his love for God seems to have failed the test; his hope of salvation for himself is very slender; and yet his faith in God remains firm. Coral's bland assertion that she lost the faith at the age of ten evokes deep-felt astonishment in the priest:

> "Dear, dear", he said, "Then I will pray for you" (94).

The faith of the political leaders concerns only the welfare of the nation - his faith is concerned with persons and their eternal destiny; for him his daughter is more important "than a whole continent" (95).

Greene's priests also believe in the miraculous. The whisky priest believes that if God intended him to escape He would save him even when in front of a firing squad (96). He could also bring the dead child back to life, if He wished. In fact,

> "The priest found himself watching the child for some movement" (97).

He believes that God can work miracles, but they will not be worked for him (98), he does not deserve it.

He believes in heaven and hell (99). The fear of hell is

(94) Ibid. p.48.
(95) Ibid. p.103.
(96) Ibid. p.167.
(97) Ibid. p.201.
(98) Ibid. p.260.
(99) Ibid. pp. 80, 87, 227, 243, 259, 269, 273.

often evoked when thinking of his daughter abandoned and tainted by the world. Like Pinkie and Scobie, his mind often dwells on this terrible truth. He even asks to incur damnation if that will save those whom he loves most (100). He never entirely despairs of his salvation, and yet if anybody is damned in that godless state of Tabasco, he thinks he will be.

HOPE is radically inseparable from faith, although it is often at the mercy of the imagination. We might say that in the whisky priest it is constantly in a state of siege. There were moments in his life when despair seemed to get the upper hand (101), when he was almost convinced he was on the road to damnation (102); and yet he struggles on to do his best for others, and eventually hope dawns anew. When he returns to his native village he is certain we can trust God to make allowances (103). This he repeats to a penitent in prison (104). The thought of God's mercy engages his mind continuously, and in the confessional it is the firm line he takes (105). Heaven, the goal of hope, becomes the main subject of his preaching(106). Speaking to the lieutenant about God's mercy, he says:

(100) Ibid. p.269.
(101) Ibid. p. 73.
(102) Ibid. p. 87.
(103) Ibid. p. 82.
(104) Ibid. p.168.
(105) Ibid. p.167.
(106) Ibid. p. 87.

> "I don't know how awful the human heart looks to Him. But I do know this - that if there's ever been a single man in this state damned, then I'll be damned too".
> He said slowly: I wouldn't want it to be any different. I just want justice, that's all" (107).

He identifies himself with sinners and believes in justice, but that does not cancel out mercy; in God the two Attributes are one. He seems however to undergo a trial that several of the Saints have undergone: the feeling that they are damned. From this dark night St. Francis merely pleaded with God that if he was not to love God for all eternity, to allow him to love Him in this life. But no Saint, as far as we know, has met his death with such a dark cloud still hanging over him. It was a temporary phase for his deeper purification. The whisky priest himself awakes after his last night in prison "with a huge feeling of hope" (108), "he was not at that moment afraid of damnation" (109). He had suffered his purification on earth.

CHARITY is the primary virtue because it attains God as He is in Himself and for Himself (110). It is the root of all other Christian virtues. Holiness is the outcome of charity when it reaches fulness of habitual grace (111). If the

(107) Ibid. p.259.
(108) Ibid. p.272.
(109) Ibid. p.273.
(110) "Fides autem et spes attingunt quidem Deum secundum quod ex Ipso provenit nobis vel cognitio veri vel adeptio boni; sed caritas attingit ipsum Deum ut in Ipso sistat, non ut ex eo aliquid nobis proveniat. Et ideo caritas est excellentior fide et spe; et per consequens omnibus aliis virtutibus" (St. Thomas, Summa Theol. II-II, q. 23, art. 6).
(111) Ibid. II-II, q. 23, art. 8.

whisky priest's charity, his love of God and of his neighbour for God's sake, is heroic, then he is a holy man. This will be the theme to study in the third part of this work.

At present let us see some of the qualities that derive from this supernatural charity of the priest, without arguing as to their heroism. There is zeal for the salvation of souls, an immediate effect of charity when fervent (112). There is the priest's sense of compassion, his "empathy" even more than "sympathy" at the basis of which is "the convincing mystery that we are made in God's image" (113). Gentleness is also an attitude of mind and body that results from the strength of character formed by charity, and everyone who meets the priest is impressed by his gentleness. His constant "excuse me" for something he does or says is a sign of his gentleness not of an inferiority complex. He expects nothing from others, but he is ready to give all.

His "broad-mindedness" does not encroach upon his orthodoxy. He is always a loyal member of the Church and will stand no denial of what she teaches as matters of faith, even though they may jar with our modern mentality or the usages of our time. He does not denounce sexual sin because of its ugliness because he realizes that sin is very often something beautiful but turned away from its purpose. As he said to the pious woman expressing contempt for what she saw in the corner of the

(112) Ibid. I-II, q. 28, art. 4.

(113) P.G., p.129.

prison cell:

> "Don't believe that. It's dangerous. Because suddenly we discover that our sins have so much beauty" (114).

Nor does he judge sin by appearances or merely by abstract principles. To the same woman he says wisely:

> "We don't know. It may be" (115),

because he distinguishes the objective misdemeanour from the subjective incurring of guilt. He knows that the individual conscience is an unfathomable mystery. Mr. and Mrs. Lehr cannot believe in the Catholic Church because of its wealth; Luis' father says the Church is Padre José and the whisky priest, and the latter has not even a pair of shoes to wear, let alone the trappings of wealth. The priest does not judge the lieutenant in his aim to get rid of all priests and religion, but he admires his conscientiousness in the things he understands and pursues, and calls him a good man with nothing to fear.

The priest's humility is perhaps the virtue that strikes the reader more than any other. He acknowledges his weaknesses to himself and to other people. He judged himself inferior to everyone else, but it did not become a "complex" with him, it liberated him for universal service. Everything about him spoke of humility: his "small bowed figure", "his head a little bent", his anonymity under the title of "the stranger", his utter poverty. His acute consciousness of his failures prompts

(114) Ibid. p.168.
(115) Ibid. p.168.

him to regard himself as a servant of the devil. He looks upon his ministry as useless because of his unworthiness. He is appalled by what he calls his corrupting influence even over children.

Graham Greene has some striking phrases with which to convey this total lack of self-importance. He is merely "somebody" who whispers in English (116), he is "a minute disappointed figure" following a child; he is "unworthy of what he carries" - his priestly powers (117). Nobody needs him (118). At his native village he does not dare to call the people "my children", because he has a child of his own. Only in the prison does he call his fellow prisoners "my children", and that in order to tell them in confidence he is a "whisky priest". His ministry creates new martyrs for God, but he himself has neither the grace nor the courage to die. "It seemed to him a damnable mockery that they should sacrifice themselves for a whisky priest with a bastard child" (119). He wishes he were at least a good Christian, let alone a good priest (120). Padre José is in his opinion, for all his faults, a better man than he, and he tells him so:

> "I always knew in my heart you were a better man" (121).

And when the lieutenant says that Padre José is not good enough

(116) Ibid. p. 4.
(117) Ibid. p.18.
(118) Ibid. p.46.
(119) Ibid. p.175.
(120) Ibid. p.152.
(121) Ibid. p.152.

to hear the whisky priest's confession, the latter flatly contradicts him.

Not even the most contemptible characters in the novel, such as the half-caste traitor, call for the priest's disesteem.

He thinks himself so utterly useless that even hell or heaven are too great for him, he belongs to a sort of limbo. Now that he can no longer say Mass, he sees no justification for his existence. He deems himself devoid of all honour, sense of responsibility, and judgement. He is constantly worried about dying in sin:

> "I tell you I am in a state of mortal sin" (122).
>
> "To die in a state of mortal sin... it makes you think" (123).

And his greatest plight is that he does not know how to repent.

When we see him washing the prison lavatories as though it were the only task for which he is competent, and at the same time hear him say:

> "I know - from experience - how much beauty Satan carried down with him when he fell" (124),

we can glimpse some idea of the terrible tension and sense of prostration that possessed his soul.

After "eight hard hopeless years" that seemed to him only "a caricature of service" (125), without a single soul to offer to God, and with everyone rejecting him, even the cold faces

(122) Ibid. p.163.
(123) Ibid. p.162.
(124) Ibid. pp. 169-170.
(125) Ibid. p. 271.

of the Saints, he has reached the nadir of self-abasement. Whereas the other Mexican martyrs die with the vibrant shout of "Viva Cristo Rey!", this poor priest can only manage to mumble something that sounds like "excuse me" and begs pardon of his executioners for putting them to so much trouble. And then, after "a single shot", he is simply "a routine-heap beside the wall - something unimportant which had to be cleared away" (126).

His last complete sentence was an act of contrition:

> "O God, I am sorry and beg pardon for all my sins.. because they have crucified my Lord Jesus Christ.. because by them I am worthy of dreadful punishments..." (127).

Some of the expressions he uses about himself would seem to be either insincere or outrageous exaggerations; but they are true to type - to a man who has sinned and has risen from mediocrity to the heights (or rather, depths) of holiness. They are the language we hear from Saints like St. Vincent de Paul and St. Francis de Sales, who both went through the ordeal of thinking themselves but the scum of the earth and firebrands destined for hell, and in whom the splendours of divine charity shone with dazzling example for all future generations.

In another part of this study we shall see how Fr. James Browne, in The Living Room, and Fr. William Callifer, in The Potting Shed, learn humility and charity by undergoing this ordeal, in varying degrees, of self-abasement. Fr. Browne says:

(126) Ibid. p.281.

(127) Ibid. p.273.

"For more than twenty years I've been a useless priest" (128).

Fr. Callifer confesses:

"I thought I had lost Him for ever" (129).

The majority of Graham Greene's priests are humble men. Only two seem to be lacking in Christian and priestly humility: Fr. Clay, in The Heart of the Matter, and Fr. Thomas, in A Burnt-Out Case. The whisky priest's humility is sublime and completely beyond the terms of reference of natural modesty and self-effacement; it is the work of the Holy Spirit acting through spiritual denudation.

Is the whisky priest a man of real piety? If by piety we understand the lengthy recitation of vocal prayers, protracted kneelings and prostrations, etc., then he can hardly be called pious. We do not see him kneeling in church in rapt devotion - there are no churches to kneel in. We do see him kneeling in prayer beside a dead child. We do know that for eight hard, hopeless years of wandering and privation he has one aim: to speak of the love of God, of God's forgiveness for all sinners, and to bring about Christ's Presence and Power in the Mass celebrated in secrecy among a few souls who risk everything for the Sacraments. And therefore if, with Aquinas, we identify piety with (130) an ever-readiness to carry out the Will of God in all circumstances, we can justly call the whisky priest a pious

(128) Graham Greene, Three Plays (London: Mercury Books, 1962), p.67.
(129) Ibid. ed. cit. p.138.
(130) "Unde devotio nihil aliud esse videtur quam voluntas quaedam prompte tradendi se ad ea quae pertinent ad Dei famulatum" (St.Thomas Summa Theol. II-II, q. 82, art. 1).

man. His piety is inseparable from his charity, his faith, his humility, because it is One and the Same Spirit working through them.

Yes, he leaves his breviary behind, but we are not told whether this was deliberate or an accident. He leaves the altar-stone behind on purpose, because its weight would have given him away, and its use in times of persecution was not obligatory.

Is he a man of prayer? In the very first chapter of the novel we see the priest pray for the grace of martyrdom. In page after page the priest asks for other people to pray for him and in return promises to pray for them. He is continually praying for his daughter since he first met her after seven years during which she had been contaminated by evil. He even prays for his Judas: "Christ had died for this man too" (131).

He prays for everyone in that godless state, and asks God to send them another priest more worthwhile their suffering (132). He asks everyone to pray for him, even the young Coral and the woman who insults him in prison (133). And yet he feels his prayers are valueless because of his state of mortal sin.

One of the saddest passages in the whole story is where the priest kneels beside the dead child, asking God nothing less than a miracle, while at the same time feeling there is an impenetrable barrier between himself and God. Greene writes:

> "He could feel no meaning any longer in prayers like these - the Host was different: to lay that between a dying man's lips was to lay God. That was a fact -

(131) P.G., ed. cit. p.126.
(132) Ibid. p.175.
(133) Ibid. p.169.

> something you could touch, but this was no more than a pious aspiration. Why should anyone listen to his prayers? Sin was a constriction which prevented their escape: he could feel his prayers weigh him down like undigested food" (134).

It is the tension between his faith and his consciousness of sin; he seems to forget that the prayer of the sinner who humbly asks is not without effectiveness even though it may not increase personal merit. He distinguishes the objective value of the Sacraments "ex opere operato" as signs and acts of Christ Himself from the subjective value of the prayer of a Christian in the state of grace. His one consolation is to know that people can fruitfully receive Christ even through the hands of a fruitless priest acting with a minimum allegiance to Christ the High Priest. And this is the conviction that keeps him in Tabasco, for if he left the state

> "It would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist" (135).

For the sake of saying Mass, our hero goes forty-eight hours without food, because he needs his last fifteen pesos to buy wine for the Sacrifice (136). Mass is the one thing that does not fall a prey to routine in his life, it is the one thing to which he gives all his powers of concentration, feeble as they are.

Some critics of this novel have contended that Greene exploits the "magical approach" to the Mass and the Sacraments and puts them in a false light. The "ex opere operato" has in the past been stressed at the expense of the "ex opere operantis",

(134) Ibid. p.197. (135) Ibid. p.80. (136) Ibid. p.133.

but the two aspects still must coalesce: the objective reality of the effectual sacramental Sign, and the subjective dispositions in the celebrant and the recipient of the Sacrament. It is the priest's clear grasp of the Sacraments as consequences of the Incarnation of the Divine in the human in Christ and the Christ-transformed world that guides the priest's actions and inspires superhuman efforts.

He has the same keen resolve in the administration of other Sacraments, such as Confession. Twice we see him hearing confessions, even though he is so exhausted that he is "too tired to drink", and weeps out of sheer exhaustion (137). He longs to make his own confession, especially on the night before his execution, because he realizes he is a sinful member of the Church and "another man... it makes it easier" (138). The virtue of penance he practises continually by his sufferings on behalf of his people (139) and also on behalf of other priests when he is in prison (140).

The half-caste says to him:

> "You may be a good man. You may be a saint for all I know" (141).

From what we have seen of him so far, I contend that he is a good man, a man treading the heights of holiness but in the disguise of a poor, sinful wretch, both in his own eyes and in

(137) Ibid. p. 53.
(138) Ibid. p.268.
(139) Ibid. p. 53.
(140) Ibid. p.166.
(141) Ibid. p.239.

the eyes of most of his observers. But, "the humble shall be exalted" (142).

III: THE DIVINE MINISTRY

1.

To outward appearances a priest is a man like any other man, but because he is a man chosen by God "for the things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1) he is invested with a sacramental "character" through Holy Orders which gives him a fuller share in the Priesthood of Christ, a "character" that may or may not be reflected in his psychological character, but which is operative in his ministry.

A man chosen from among men - a mediator between God and men - a dispenser of the divine "mysteries" - and interpreter of God's Word to man - an offerer of sacrifice to God - an offerer of God's gifts to man - in the name and power of Jesus Christ the one Mediator and High Priest (143).

(142) Matthew 23:12.

(143) "Respondeo dicendum quod proprium officium sacerdotii est esse mediatorem inter Deum et populum: in quantum scilicet divina populo tradit, unde dicitur sacerdos, quasi, sacra dans, secundum illud Malach. 2:7: Legem requirunt ex ore eius, scilicet sacerdotis; et iterum in quantum preces populi Deo offert, et pro errum peccatis Deo aliqualiter satisfacit; unde Apostolus dicit, Hebr. 5:1: Omnis pontifex ex hominibus assumptus, pro hominibus constituitur in iis quae sunt ad Deum, ut offerat dona et sacrificia pro peccatis. Hoc autem maxime convenit Christo. Nam per ipsum divina bona hominibus sunt collata... (St. Thomas, Summa Theologica, III, q. 22, art. 1.).

A modern theologian, Yves Congar, paraphrases the words of the letter to the Hebrews as follows:

> "A priest is a man chosen by God from among men and appointed for service in the things which represent their order or their return to God" (144).

Graham Greene, aware of this theology of the priesthood, creates in fiction a priest who is eminently real and human, a priest buffeted by trial and temptation in a real, though exceptionally unpleasant, world; a man strengthened by his grace of ordination, a fulfilment of Christ's promise: "And be assured, I am with you always, to the end of time" (Mt.28:20). In The Power and the Glory Greene shows a remarkable grasp of what the priest is and his significance in the world. He vividly illustrates the truth that God "has given us (priests) a great grace: He has called and chosen us. It was not our doing; of ourselves we had nothing to make us worthy of that call and that grace" (145).

The whisky priest often thinks about his vocation to the priesthood (146), and in the light of his failures, wonders whether he really had a vocation because, although he felt himself called by God, he also felt motivated at the beginning by worldly considerations. He is also concerned about the religious vocation of a woman he meets in prison who tells him she

(144) Yves Congar, O.P., Priest and Layman (London: Longman & Todd, Ltd. 1967), p.96.

(145) Karl Rahner, Servants of the Lord (London: Burns & Oates, 1968), p.81.

(146) P.G., p.83.

had a vocation but "the nuns had refused to recognize"it (147). He sympathized with the woman (148) in her frustration, and was glad he had been given the opportunity to exercise the priesthood. He readily agreed with those theologians who call the priesthood a tremendous, unmerited, all-consuming grace. All he can do is "to transform and set in motion the gifts which God has given him". He is a priest for the service of others: a "diakonia". As Fr. Congar says:

> "Our speciality as priests is to serve men in their vertical dimension, that by which they are citizens not of the earthly city but of the City of God" (149).

It was because the whisky priest realized he was "the slave of his people" that he let the boat leave for Vera Cruz without him, that although reduced to utter exhaustion he says amid his tears: "O, let them come. Let them all come... I am your servant" (150). He is a priest for others, not for himself. When he sees his penitents shriven and consoled leave the stable, the sad thought strikes him that "he was the only one left who hadn't repented, confessed, and been absolved" (151). When the dying American gangster tells him to run away because danger is imminent, the priest reminds him that a priest has not gone all that way to talk about himself (152). When, "with his head a

(147) Ibid. p.271.
(148) Ibid. p.271.
(149) Y. Congar, op cit. p.95.
(150) P.G., p.53.
(151) Ibid. p.221.
(152) Ibid. p.243.

little bent" he hears Coral's father tell him he has no business to be in the house, he is just as ready to go as to stay. Being a priest of Christ, like Christ he has to reproduce the meekness of the lamb - the Lamb of God - ready for slaughter. He is also by vocation a "scapegoat" burdened with the sins of his people.

A priest is also the "dispenser of the divine mysteries", especially of the Body and Blood of Christ:

> "We priests celebrate the sacrifice of our altars together with the whole people, so that Jesus Christ shall be present in the midst of the world, in the midst of his holy community, as the crucified and the risen One, as the Son of Man with the pierced heart, as the fountain of light, blessing, and grace, as the primal source of all spirit, of all love, and of all eternal life (153).

Five of the seven Sacraments depend immediately on the priest for their existence, and he is <u>par excellence</u> the preacher of the word of God. So, in spite of the whisky priest's acute consciousness of unworthiness, of being a scandal to the faithful, he refrains from leaving Tabasco. "No priest, no Church", "no priest, no Eucharist; no Eucharist no Church". No wonder he is always so careful to take on his wanderings the essential requisites for the Mass. The Consecration of the Mass - that is the flashpoint of his life that is not obscured by routine, that is the moment when impatience abruptly ceases, that is the supreme Reality for him on earth.

One of the most moving and revealing chapters of the novel is that in which the priest is looking for wine for the Mass.

(153) K. Rahner, op. cit. p.83.

He would give everything he possessed "for some real genuine grape wine". He has not eaten for forty-eight hours; he has fifteen pesos and a few centavos in his pocket; but what he really wants is only wine for the Mass:

"You don't know how I long for wine" (154)

he says. And the Governor's cousin sells him a bottle - which is drunk to the dregs before his very eyes by the Governor's cousin, the chief of police, and a beggar. Such is the shock of disappointment that the priest bursts into tears. It seems to him that "all the hope of the world" is fading away. Without the possibility of saying Mass he feels completely frustrated, useless, unarmed, and impotent for any good or evil. During the last year he had celebrated only four Masses, but these four Masses had justified his existence among people and had given him courage to continue suffering and wandering. Without the Mass the world can only be inhabited by men "with nothing to do or nothing to believe and nowhere better to go", like the men who drank his wine. From that moment he felt that God was dead in the state. And thunder suddenly crashed overhead. And the chief of police prophesied that it was "bad news for men".

The priest in Holy Orders has received the grace and mandate to speak "the efficacious word" in the other Sacraments as well. That is why, though he is exhausted with fatique, he hears confessions and absolves the poor people from their sins.

(154) P.G., p.141.

After arriving at the Lehrs' in a state of collapse he rests for a short while, and then immediately says Mass, baptizes people, and from eight to ten o'clock hears the confessions of "a continuous stream of penitents" (155).

Karl Rahner has this profound reflection on the priestly ministry:

> "It is the grace to utter God's word that comes from above and not from below, that word which is the wisdom of God and not of men. We must keep coming back to this world, bringing it the word of God, ever old and ever new, still uncomprehended, whether in season or out of season, whether men are willing to hear us or unwilling. We must speak and make known God the Living Being, Jesus Christ our Lord, His kingdom and His Church, His eternity and His grace, His divine Life that He would give us, frail mortals that we are, poor, oppressed, craven, insignificant, despairing men that we are. Again and again we must pitifully utter this word; men will not care to listen, and after all they are right. For most of the time we do not speak the word at all as we ought. We stammer, and we cannot seem to speak the word from the heart. We keep obscuring it by our own bad example, with our own wretched humanness. Yet God has given us the grace to utter and proclaim this word of his, to keep speaking it in this world; and it is light and strength, blessing and grace from on high, it is eternal life, it is the word of God that does not perish but abides forever" (156).

We have quoted this long paragraph because, apart from its truth and beauty, it has a special bearing on Greene's portrayal of the whisky priest.

The truth must be upheld, even by an unworthy priest. And so we hear the whisky priest tell Coral she must not steal her father's brandy, and even in one of his dreams he advises her to be honest. He admits to the beggar that "a starving man has got the right to save himself certainly", but he must not kill people

(155) Ibid. p.221. (156) Karl Rahner, op. cit. p.82.

to obtain food. The half-caste hopes to receive money for betraying the priest, and the priest does not begrudge him money, but tells him to pray to God and give the blood money away. He tells the lieutenant that everyone will be judged according to his conscience, and praises his clear - though erroneous - consciousness of duty.

The truth about the value of suffering in the life-long process of redemption is very difficult to convey to others unless, like the whisky priest, one lives near the heart of suffering and one is a realist. Anything that diminishes one's personality and power of expression is an evil to be combatted, but the secret of the Gospel is that in suffering, the Power of the Risen Christ is given its privileged scope (157), and that patient endurance with adherence to God's Will develops a man's potentialities for good, for himself and for others, as nothing else can.

Suffering is the very climate of <u>The Power and the Glory</u>. The priest tells his poor, long-suffering people:

> "Pray that you suffer more and more and more.
> Never get tired of suffering" (158),

and he never gets tired of extolling the merit of suffering. He tells the woman in prison who had been debarred from entering a convent that her present lot was a better one "than being a nun and happy". Suffering is the royal road to heaven. There are so many things in the world we simply cannot change that suffering is inevitable, so the clue to happiness is acceptance

(157) Cfr. I Cor. 1; II Cor. 12:9, etc.
(158) <u>P.G.</u>, p.86.

with love. Only the saints are really happy, because only they know how to feed love on suffering. We shall reap according to what we have sown. The sufferings of the whisky priest have their harvest in heaven, but even in this life they bear fruit - a priest appears after his death in Tabasco to carry on his priestly work.

"Verba suadent, exempla trahunt" was a tag ever in the mind of this priest that gave him a lot of concern. His exercise of the ministry bore witness to Christ and His Church, but his personal life seemed a flat denial of his ministry. He knew that people, especially the young, judged the whole Church by what they saw in the only priest of their acquaintance or by hearsay, and he trembled. The very thought of his dying a martyr seemed to him a contradiction in terms. It "had never occurred to him - that anybody could consider him a martyr", but Maria tells him that if he is caught he will be one. It was a great puzzle to him:

> "It's difficult. Very difficult. I'll think about it. I wouldn't want the Church to be mocked" (159).

"It wouldn't be a good thing to bring mockery on the Church", he says to the woman in prison. To defend the honour of the Church he is ready to forfeit his own honour at any time. He makes a public confession of his sins, declaring himself in the state of mortal sin, so that even if he were killed he would never be a real martyr. He defends the priesthood of the Church, but remembering he is a priest himself, repeats continually that he is the odd exception to the general run of

(159) Ibid. p.99.

priests, he is a whisky priest, a bad priest, a fallen angel:

> "You mustn't think they are all like me... There are good priests and bad priests. It is just that I am a bad priest" (160).

Thus, on the one hand he feels an overwhelming urge to speak the truth to men in the name of God, advising, preaching, defending; and on the other, he sees his example pulling the other way. And every priest, whatever his personal life, endorses the words of Karl Rahner:

> "We (priests) are unprofitable servants serving a Lord who is the incomprehensible God, who dwells in light inaccessible, whose ways are inscrutable and judgements beyond our comprehension" (161).

When The Power and the Glory appeared, an ecclesiastic in high authority said the book was paradoxical, disturbing, extraordinary. These words implied censure. But Ronald Matthews asks whether it would be possible to find other terms to describe the passage of Jesus Christ through the world (162). Christ was paradoxical, hated, crucified. The servant is not above the Master. The priest is in the world, but he does not belong to the world. He dispenses God's grace, even though he is a sinner himself. His vocation is his life, and his life is his vocation. The priest has no private life independent of and outside the priesthood, and yet his office frequently goes unmatched by personal holiness demanded by the office.

(160) Ibid. p.250.
(161) K. Rahner, op. cit. p.84.
(162) Ronald Matthews, Mon ami Graham Greene (Bruges: D. de Brouwer, 1957), p.216.

The whisky priest is a wanderer, a stranger, a man to be got rid of - "Couldn't you go a bit farther north, father?" (163) .... a man whose capture and destruction is more profitable than that of any gangster... a man for whom "a natural hatred, as between dog and dog, stirred in the lieutenant's bowels" (164). Hunger and thirst torment him. On one occasion he is so hungry that he fights with a bitch for a bone, despite his sense of human dignity (165). On another he takes a small lump of sugar from the mouth of a dead child. And so great is his thirst at times that he once sucked at his soaked trousers (166). His fatigue is often mentioned - "immeasurably tired", even "too tired to drink" (167). Such familiarity with suffering endows his sermon with particular poignancy:

> "fever, hunger... that is all part of heaven - the preparation" (168).

Christ died for sinners, for a world bereft of spiritual beauty, for a world estranged from His Father, and only through death was he glorified by rising in power and sending His Spirit to the world to bring about a new creation. The whisky priest also dies for the perpetrators and victims of hatred, violence, and corruption in the godless loathsome Mexican state of Tabasco. He dies, like Christ, pardoning and praying for his persecutors.

(163) P.G., p.77.
(164) Ibid. p.22.
(165) Ibid. p.187.
(166) Ibid. p.204.
(167) Ibid. p.206.
(168) Ibid. p.86.

Therefore, if a priest can be defined as a man called by God to serve men by administering to them the divine mysteries and communicating to them the word of God, and if a Christian priest is one who shares the sufferings and compassion of Christ, there is no doubt that Greene's portrayal of the "whisky priest" in The Power and the Glory is firmly set within a theological appreciation of the priesthood.

In the priest as in the Church there are two elements: one that is permanent, indestructible; the other that is always in motion, subject to change, and moving restlessly towards a goal. But these two elements are integrated into unity. Thus the Church has the promise of indefectibility and is the mightiest conservative force in the world, but at the same time is everywhere and at all times open to new life and progressive assimilation. The Catholic priesthood also has stability and movement:

> "A dead thing can easily endure, for it requires no promise. But a promise that life shall not run itself away to death is the promise of a miracle. And the Church of the Holy Ghost has received just that promise" (169).

Priests share Christ's position of cornerstone of the whole edifice, but they also are stones "that live and breathe" and provide unrest in the Church. Their psychology and their pastoral methods will vary as the times and cultures change. But certain basic qualities and a fundamental outlook are

(169) K. Rahner, op. cit. p.122.

essential and permanent for all times and places. It is these that Graham Greene delineates in The Power and the Glory, leaving aside those aspects of the priesthood that are more or less marginal; it is these permanent features that he dramatizes in answer to the questions of sacerdotal theology: what is a priest? what is the reason for his existence? of what stuff is the genuine priest made? And the answers Greene gives anticipate in many ways the ideas authoritatively expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

2.

In Greene's "Catholic" novels and plays there are pitched battles between God and Satan, good and evil, grace and sin. God is in the midst of this world - "God's about on earth" - and, try as men may, He cannot be banished, He cannot be thwarted or overcome. In The Power and the Glory the contesting forces are neatly summed up in the apostolic priest and the fanatic lieutenant. The former preaches the value of suffering, the way of love, the hope of heaven - God and His Church; the latter demands happiness through abundance of this world's goods, the way of hatred, the hope of a world emancipated from all supernatural allegiance - Satan and his dominion. And whereas in Brighton Rock the battlefield was the individual soul, especially Pinkie, here it is the wider context of the Church and the world in their representatives: the priest and the lieutenant.

It is the twentieth century version of the medieval morality plays.

Pinkie, Sarah Miles, Scobie, Querry, and Brown are psychological worlds where the battle is fought interiorly rather than externally. Bendrix could be considered a symbol of evil, but less obviously and on a lesser scale than the lieutenant, but they both have in common a feeling of boredom and failure at the end. In no other work of Greene's is the canvas so broad and each character so highly charged with universal significance, but the priest and the lieutenant are the personification of the cosmic struggle. If the prison is "very much like the world" (170) according to the priest; the lieutenant is quite sure that "one day they'll forget there ever was a Church here"(171).

3.

The four cardinal points of <u>The Power and the Glory</u> are: the visible priest and the lieutenant, and the invisible Church in her Mystery of grace, and the dominion of Satan in the world. All other characters, even the half-caste and Padre José, are merely figures who give movement to the novel and complete its metaphysical import.

Very few of Greene's characters have been depicted with so much accuracy, care, and attention as the lieutenant. He reminds us of Querry and Dr. Colin in <u>A Burnt-Out Case</u>; of Querry after

(170) <u>P.G.</u>, p.161.
(171) Ibid. p.67.

leaving for the Congo in his smart demeanour and chastity, and of Dr. Colin in his altruism. His role in the story is almost as important as the priest's, and although the theme of this study is the priesthood, the lieutenant must also come in for detailed consideration seeing that he represents the world in the power of Satan, and therefore provides a clue to the nature of the Church's struggle, which is the paramount theme of the novel.

In view of the physical and spiritual atmosphere of the story, the portrait of the lieutenant seems admirably done. He is "a little dapper figure of hate carrying his secret love" (172) in contrast to the little priest dressed in a shabby dark suit with a three-day beard; his neatness gives the impression "of inordinate ambition in the shabby city" (173). The contrast continues throughout the book. While the policemen walk "raggedly with rifles slung anyhow" (174), the lieutenant's gaiters and boots are polished, his pistol-holster winks in the sunlight, his leggings glint, and all his buttons are sewn on. He has a lean dancer's face, whereas the Chief of Police is "a stout man with a pink fat face" (175).

The lieutenant is in many respects like an ascetic; he is austere and parsimonious, his room is no more comfortable than a monastic cell with a very hard bed, a straw mat, one

(172) Ibid. p.71.
(173) Ibid. p.19.
(174) Ibid. p.18.
(175) Ibid. p.20.

cushion or bolster, and a sheet. When he finds the Chief of Police at the canteen playing billiards, he stands in an attitude of silent protest at the door. He is radical in his measures of reform, every obstacle would have to be eliminated: the Church, the politicians, and even his own Chief would one day have to go. He dreams of a transformed world worthy of the rising generation. For the sake of the children he wants "to begin the world again with them, in a desert" (176), therefore everything inherited from the past must be destroyed. His ambition is all-consuming and yet he is indifferent to his personal fate. He has a great love for children, and his goal is to free their childhood from all that can make them unhappy. Every child in the world "is worth more than the Pope in Rome". For them he is ready for any effort, as long as their future is less miserable than the life he leads now (177). He will even quote words of Christ, such as

> "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:3)

when he caresses Luis. He says he is not a barbarian, he respects other people's ideas. And he puts this into practice to the extent of treating the priest with courtesy and even giving him money. He has nothing against the priest personally as a man, he even admires him, but he abominates his priesthood and

(176) Ibid. p.71.

(177) Ibid. p.286.

everything to do with it. And yet, out of courtesy, he gives him time to hear the gangster's confession before taking him to prison, and in the prison he is willing for him to share a common cell if he does not wish to be alone on the last night of his life. He takes his captive some brandy in prison and exposes himself to considerable risk by going to ask Padre José to come and hear the priest's confession. There is a touch of kindness in the lieutenant's advice to the priest to take a sleep and in his assurance that the pain of being shot lasts only for a second. It seems as if the officer's dealings with the priest somehow makes the former more spiritually-minded.

The lieutenant's ardent desire to capture the priest was inspired by his outlook on the world and his love for children. His is a love of benevolence of purely human origin, it is not self-regarding; and as such is very close to God-inspired love in its motivation. Here we may apply the theological principle: "God does not deny grace to men who do what they can", and in view of the lieutenant's unselfish single-mindedness of purpose and his service to others we wonder why two such dedicated men can be so wholly opposed. Greene emphasizes that

> "There was something of a priest in his intent observant walk - a theologian going back over the errors of the past to destroy them again" (178)

and that the religious problem is the one which most torments him, convinced as he is that it is the fertile source of all

(178) Ibid. p.25.

evils in the contemporary world. It infuriates him to think there are still people in the state who believe in God. In his opinion there is no such being as a loving and merciful God - that is all an invention of the priests who only want the people's money. He argues that if there were a God in heaven He would not allow people to starve, least of all the children. If truth be told, he thinks, not even the priests believe in heaven or hell, otherwise they would not be so eager to escape death and avoid a second of pain in return for eternal happiness. He broods over the wealth of the Church and the avarice of priests (179) against the poverty of so many people (180); his mind dwells frequently on suffering, divine Providence, the source of life, the faith of priests, etc. with almost theological acumen. He has heard about mystics "who are said to have experienced God directly", but his only mystical experience is that of vacancy, "a complete certainty in the existence of a dying, cooling world, of human beings who had evolved from animals for no purpose at all. He knew" (181).

There was this great gulf between the lieutenant and the Chief of Police: the latter still retains some belief in God, the former has divested himself of all religious ideas; and this conviction of the non-existence of God is the mainspring of all the officer's activity to bring about a new kind of life from which all memories of the past are erased. The image of

(179) Ibid. p.250.
(180) Ibid. p. 93.
(181) Ibid. p. 25.

God must be obliterated from the world, the priests must be eliminated: then "everything will be fine" (182). "A single priest does more real harm than a robber and a murderer, such as the gangster" (183).

Psychological discernment is one of the lieutenant's intellectual endowments. He pinpoints La Concepción as the most likely place where the priest will take refuge because of its comparative safety (184); he cunningly persuades the villagers to help him chase the priest, on the score that he is a traitor to the Republic and therefore anyone sheltering him is an accomplice in the crime most liable to the heaviest penalties, and then from threats he proceeds to promises for their collaboration. One thing he fails to realize: the superstitious belief of the people in divine retribution upon anyone betraying a priest.

At the same time the lieutenant is very human. He does not like to judge people, and when he has to sit down at the Chief's table to pronounce sentence, he does so "with dapper irritation". He is quite ready to take hostages from every village and shoot them whenever necessary for his purpose, but in the priest's native village he merely tries to cajole the people into collaborating with him and thus spare him the ordeal of taking hostages. Only when they all refuse to inform does he say:

(182) Ibid. p.93.
(183) Ibid. p.23.
(184) Ibid. p.68.

"Right, then I shall choose my man. You've brought it on yourselves" (185).

Much against his humanitarian feelings, he has many hostages shot.

It is when dealing with children that he himself becomes as confident and open as a child. When a small boy touches the holster of the lieutenant's pistol, he pinches the boy's ear and assures the children he is fighting for their good, for their's alone; the children and he are on the same side (186).

He is fiercely patriotic. The foreigner has too much wealth and power in Mexico, he must be got rid of. It is urgent to remove from the state everything "at which a foreigner might have cause to sneer" (187), beginning with religion. He is so proud of his country that he "wouldn't even accept the benefit of shade from a foreigner". To him foreigners are barbarians.

On the wall of his room is a picture of the President of. Mexico, but he does not agree with the ideals of the politicians of the day. He does not trust either the Governor or his own Chief of Police, and he wants all his orders in writing (188). In the new world of his dreams there will be no place for men like his Chief: good-natured, sentimental, religious, always trying to steer a middle course; such men are irritating and ignoble. And when he learns he is responsible for the priest's capture he is greatly elated and thinks the world is at his feet.

(185) Ibid. p.96. (186) Ibid. p.69. (187) Ibid. p.66.
(188) Ibid. p.68.

To sum up: the lieutenant is tidy, austere, friendly with children, humane, patriotic, altruistic, sincere, intelligent... He has something of the priest, the theologian the mystic. He is chaste and easily forgoes sexual indulgence. No wonder the priest says to him: "You're a good man. You've got nothing to be afraid of" (189).

Graham Greene thus portrays the ideal man who, humanly, cannot fail. And if he fails, it is because of some supernatural divine power that comes between him and his triumph. And the lieutenant does fail. Having captured the priest and talked with him at length, a small boy candidly asks him whether his ambition is fulfilled, but the lieutenant gives no answer, he simply tries to smile back - "an odd sour grimace, without triumph or hope" (190). The chipped angels of the cemetery and the black letters of its portico, the site where the cathedral had been, the silence, the sense of desolation, the priest in gaol... do not appear to him to be signs of his victory but of his failure. Perhaps "One has to begin again" (191).

"The spring of his action seemed to be broken" (192).

When the officer returns from the priest's execution he reminds us of the centurion in the Gospels after witnessing the death of Christ. He thinks he has merely done his duty but his conscience tells him that the priest was an innocent man (193).

(189) Ibid. p.267.
(190) Ibid. p.262.
(191) Ibid. p.262
(192) Ibid. p.268
(193) Cfr. Luke 23:47.

He no longer feels trigger-happy in pursuit of his ideals. Even his little friend Luis spits on his revolver butt and does not smile back at him, but crinkles up his face. It is Luis who answers the door when the new priest calls, and he kisses the priest's hand. An apt symbolism of the lieutenant's failure. Having hunted down his prey, his best friends turn on him. An apt symbolism of the world in its fight against the Church of Christ, against God. If the priest was a danger, it was in so far as he was the ambassador of Christ, a steward of God. The priest was Christ's lieutenant (194). One priest dies, but another takes his place. It is useless to fight against God.

And yet, within the sphere of his own conscience, the lieutenant represents the man of good faith, however mistaken he may be. He will be judged by his conscience. His persecution of the Church is the outcome of his zeal for good, as he understands it. The priest told him:

> "It's no good your working for your end
> unless you're a good man yourself" (195),

and in this brief sentence we have the whole doctrine of subjective morality whereby a sincere intention gives value to human acts. It is the lieutenant's goal that is the real failure. His struggle in the name of the world is hopeless against a priest fighting in the cause of God. The priest's death spells victory for the priest and his cause; the lieutenant relies on

(194) This fight between the two "lieutenants" sums up the theme of the novel.

(195) P.G., p.252.

human qualities and fails. Even if all the latter's supporters were as perfect human beings as himself, the goal would still be unattainable and the struggle a miserable defeat. Even if every priest in the Church had the failings of the whisky priest, the Church would triumph, because the Church has received the divine promise:

> "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

The fulfilment of such a promise to such a Church as represented by the whisky priest and a Padre José is nothing short of a continual miracle.

.....

4.

The central idea of The Power and the Glory is that the priest is only an instrument of the Power of God in the world.

Frank B. Norris, S.S., commenting on the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests of Vatican II, says:

> "The latter /the bishop/ however, is an instrument of Christ in His threefold role of Teacher, Worshipper, .. and Shepherd. Therefore the simple priest genuinely participates in each of the bishop's functions" (196).

St. Thomas Aquinas teaches the same doctrine (197). The

(196) Frank B.Norris, S.S., Decree on Priestly Training and Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests of Vatican Council II (Glen Rock, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1966), p.76.

(197) "Secundo autem modo homo potest operari ad interiorem effectum sacramenti, in quantum operatur per modum ministri. Nam eadem ratio est ministri et instrumenti: utriusque enim actio exterius adhibetur, sed sortitur effectum interiorem ex virtute principalis agentis, quod est Deus" (St. Thomas, Summa Theol. III, q.64, art. 1).

priest is only, but always, an instrument of God who was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The priest acts in persona Christi (198). As a man, the priest is a human being like other men: poor, dejected, weak, and sinful. When God chooses him from among men He does not deliver him from his human limitations or take away his psychological make-up. Like other men, he can refuse to co-operate with divine grace and live in a state of mortal sin. He can even be lacking in faith. What endures is his ambassadorial function as minister of the efficacious sacramental word, so long as he intends to do what the Church does. When the bishop ordains men by the laying on of hands "he gives them a new authority; he promises them, through this holy sacrament /of Orders/ the grace necessary for validly and worthily exercising this holy office".

Holy Orders do not turn men into angels. The mystery of the priesthood is such that even a priest devoid of faith and holiness is instrumental in communicating and fostering sanctification and salvation to others who approach in faith.

The whisky priest is perfectly aware of this, and therefore, although he judges himself to be in a continual state of sin, he is convinced he has a priestly mission to carry out. He cannot renounce his priesthood, as he tells Maria:

(198) "Christus autem est fons totius sacerdotii: nam sacerdos legalis erat figura ipsius; sacerdos autem novae legis in persona ipsius operatur" (op. cit. q. 22, art. 4).

> "Oh yes... I understand. But it's not what you want - or I want..." (199).

If he stays in Tabasco it is because, first and last, God wants him to preach the divine revelation and administer the Sacraments to the community of the redeemed. He speaks not as a philosopher or a sage, nor because he is a living example of what he exhorts others to be. He feels his own unworthiness "like a weight at the back of his tongue". He says to others "your sins are forgiven you", but while they leave the shed renewed and clean, he remains the only one who has not "repented and been absolved" (200). But his unworthiness is not the cause of the lieutenant's hatred, it is his priesthood as such, it is the Church as the instrument of God. The whisky priest never doubts his priesthood. Greene makes the point that

> "He cried out stubbornly in a voice of authority: 'That is why I tell you that heaven is here' " (201).

Many of the people also realize that he is an ambassador of Christ and tell him when he arrives in the village that the bell must be rung, for it is a great honour.

An instrument is always moved by the principal cause. The more perfect the instrument, the less skill is needed by the principal cause that uses it. Contrariwise, the more intelligent and perfect the principal cause, the less it depends on the perfection of the instrument. The Saints are fond of saying

(199) P.G., p. 99.
(200) Ibid. p.221.
(201) Ibid. p. 86.

that God is pleased to use the vilest creatures in order to perform His greatest works. The "nothingness of the Handmaid of the Lord" was God's instrument for bringing about the Incarnation of the Eternal Son of God (Luke 1:48-49).

God does not depend on ability or even sanctity in the priest in order to make him the instrument of His grace. Of course, a holy priest is an apter instrument and many graces are given to men through the holiness of the minister that would not otherwise be given; but God does not allow the imperfection of the instrument to annul the instrumental function in the realm of grace. Graham Greene, speaking to Ronald Matthews, points out that this is the leading idea of the novel:

> "Le thème du Rocher de Brighton et du Fond du Problème c'était, dit Graham, la miséricorde de Dieu. Dans La fin d'une liaison et dans The Living Room, c'était l'amour de Dieu. Dans La Puissance et la Gloire, on avait eu le souci de faire la distinction entre l'homme et sa fonction. On ne disait pas que, parce qu'il était un ivrogne, il était un bon prêtre; on disait que, bien qu'il fût un ivrogne, c'était tout de même un prêtre" (202).

The author could not have explained the theme of The Power and the Glory with greater precision. K. Rahner writes:

> "It must be said that office, authority, sacraments... have a primal meaning and validity that is generally independent of the holiness, the pneumatic endowment, of the person dispensing those gifts or wielding that

(202) Ronald Matthews, Mon ami Graham Greene (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1957), p.221.

> authority. Otherwise a man seeking salvation would be compelled to ascertain whether in encountering word and sacrament he also encountered truth existentially practised and holiness in the minister and preacher. He could either be at men's mercy, no longer at the mercy of God alone, or he would have to find God without men" (203).

The ultimate reason for this is always the same: the priest is only an instrument of God when he celebrates the Eucharist and the other Sacraments or when he preaches the word of God, and an instrument is effective only in so far as it is moved by the Principal Cause (204).

This is the central theme of The Power and the Glory where the leading character, a priest with many faults and failings, refrains from crossing the border to another state in spite of great inducements to do so, because he feels he must make Christ sacramentally present and active among the people of Tabasco, and he must in Christ's name forgive them their sins. He wields an instrumental power independently of his merits or demerits.

No doubt Graham Greene could have depicted a holy priest, like Fr. Donissan or the Abbé Calou, and the distinction between personal holiness and the priestly office would still stand; but for his purpose he was better served by a priest labouring under

(203) K. Rahner, op. cit. pp.102-103.

(204) St. Thomas, Summa Theol. III, q.64, art. 5.

human weakness and even sinfulness. The whisky priest himself acknowledges there are good priests and bad. St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Vincent de Paul were also priests, but as such they were only instruments of God - a thought which the latter Saint often stressed when speaking or writing to his fellow priests. When we see a very imperfect man - judging by appearances - carrying out the priestly functions, it is only genuine faith that can enable us to see beyond the man to Christ the High Priest acting through his words and actions. Both the whisky priest and Padre José carry the same essential power of Christ.

This does not mean of course that there is no relationship between man and priestly function. A man who is chosen and consecrated as a special instrument of Christ must be responsive to the action of Christ, not only by intending to do what Christ or the Church has commanded as regards the essential constituents of the Sacraments and of the word that is preached, but responsive in his whole life so that he may bear witness to the power of Christ alive in him. The priest's total life must be a visible Sign of the High Priest. Where this relationship is lacking, as for example in Padre José, it becomes difficult to see Christ acting through and with such a blunt instrument; difficult but not impossible. And that is why the whisky priest is so anxious that Padre José should hear his confession on the eve of his execution, because the former is a man of great faith;

whereas the lieutenant considers Padre José unworthy to hear the whisky priest's confession; because he fails to see the true meaning of a Sacrament.

The Church is endowed with all the means for giving holiness to the world, but the members of the Church must open themselves to these means. This is particularly incumbent upon the priest whose purpose in life is to make these means of holiness available to others. If to every man Christ said "be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect"; to those most closely identified with Him he said: "You are the salt of the earth"... And throughout the history of the Church we meet numerous priests who have risen to the peaks of holiness.

This is the whisky priest's consolation: he knows there are other priests more worthy to dispense the "divine mysteries" than he, and that the Church never ceases to produce men of the highest spiritual calibre for the ministry.

In The Power and the Glory everything seems to conspire against the triumph of divine grace: the godless state, the lieutenant, the prevailing moral decadence, the timid faithful, the gangster, the half-caste bent on treachery, the sacrilegious Padre José, and even to all appearances, the whisky priest himself. But when, with the death of the last active priest, God's cause seems lost, new spiritual life breaks out interiorly in the characters involved, the priest is recognized as a martyr, and a new priest appears on the scene to carry

forward the work of divine grace. This is the paradox of Christianity - life out of death, victory out of failure, the glory of the Resurrection out of the ignominy of the Cross and dereliction (205).

Here on earth much of the priest's work is done under the cloak of anonymity; the only name that counts is that Name that is above all other names, the name of Jesus Christ. This is signified in the novel towards the end where after the death of the whisky priest a visitor calls at a house and simply says: "I am a priest" (206). The newcomer is a tall, pale man - an ascetic-looking figure denoting spiritual prowess in contrast with the puny, unkempt, down-at-heels figure of the whisky priest. And before he can give his name a boy kisses the priest's hand in reverence and welcome.

It is the Priesthood of Christ that redeems the world. Churches may be burnt to the ground time and time again, the temples of the Holy Spirit are the worshippers in spirit and truth (207). To bring the Body and Blood of Christ for the nourishment of the redeemed, that is the Church's main task, that is the main service the priest can render. Holiness and

(205) Greene wrote an essay on the paradoxes of Christianity under the French title: Essais Catholiques (Paris: Editions de Seuill, 1953).
(206) Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, The Church Today (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1967), p.19. The Power and the Glory, p.175.
(207) In The Lawless Roads, Greene writes that Garrido "had destroyed every church". Ed. cit. p.129.

sin both play their roles in the Redemption, beginning with the sinlessness of the Virgin Mary and the treachery of Judas.

God's Presence and Power in the midst of apparent absence and weakness, the victory of non-violent power, has an immense moral attraction. It is the counterpart of nature where a small seed burgeons into a mighty tree, a little yeast ferments a batch of flour. Faith is that little seed in the heart of the whisky priest which no human power could eradicate. The consciousness of being God's instrument of love and mercy through the announcement of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments and the offering of the Sacrifice was the source of his endurance.

But this priestly power and service is the target of the world's hostility when gripped by Satan. The lieutenant and the priest represent this conflict. Between them there is a certain common ground: neither likes compromise, both in their own way are inflexible and ready to die for their beliefs, both are idealistic on different levels. They admire each other and to a certain extent are ready to help each other. In a way they are friends, as men, but in their outlook on the basic values of life they are irreconcilable; they personify the Church and the world "for which Christ did not pray", the world in the grip of evil. When the lieutenant consents to risk his job by going to fetch Padre José to hear the whisky priest's confession, he does so not only because of his sincere regard

for the priest, but also because:

> "It would be a triumph for that corrupt God-ridden world if it could show itself superior on any point - whether of courage, truthfulness, justice..." (208).

The priest and the lieutenant are the warp and woof of the texture of reality of the story. It is the parable of the wheat and the tares. It is the substance and the shadow. And in the end, even the lieutenant seems to be changed. "Sanguis martyrum semen est christianorum", wrote Tertullian.

.....

5.

Graham Greene represents the Church as an embattled citadel which can never be defeated (209) and seeks to express, especially in The Power and the Glory, something of the "Mystery" inherent in the Church which in itself defies human explanation and yet accounts for its indefectibility until the end of time.

Never has it been more difficult than today to write about the Catholic Church. Since Vatican II theology is mainly centred around a discussion of basic elements in the Church and the Church's very nature (210) An understanding of basic truths about the Church lies at the root of theological and practical

(208) P.G., p.263.

(209) John Atkins, Graham Greene (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966), pp. 224-5.

(210) Hans Küng, The Living Church (London and New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), p.333.

difficulties when the various Christian confessions get together in dialogue for the purpose of Christian unity. The recent Synod of bishops in Rome took authority in the Church as the central theme of their discussions. The theologian Charles Davis comments:

> "The period from Trent to Vatican II has been dominated by an absolutist system, according to which almost all authority is derived downwards from the top. This system is now breaking up (211).

The Church, however, is first and foremost a Community called into being by Christ and sustained by His Spirit. Modes of exercising authority change with the times, and the Church, incarnate in this world of time and space, cannot but borrow from the world expressions of power structures. But as cultures come and go, are born, mature, decline, and die, the Church goes on and is ever awake to new life and new life forms. There is a basic "constitution" of the Church that springs from its mysterious union with the Divine Redeemer. As Pius XII says in his encyclical:

> "We are by no means unaware that when men seek to understand and explain this mysterious doctrine - concerning our union with the divine Redeemer... - their feeble vision is obstructed by many veils which enshroud the truth in a sort of mist" (212).

It is this which the lieutenant, and the world he represents,

(211) Charles Davis, God's Grace in History (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1966), pp. 63-64.

(212) Mystici Corporis, Pope Pius XII (London: C.T.S. 1943), pp.47-48.

fails to understand. This is the "Mystery" of the Church which is hidden from the Chief of Police, the Governor's cousin, and the beggar who- having drunk up the priest's wine - indulge in terms such as "mystery", "soul", "the source of life" without being aware that the Church is the "locus" where these things meet and have their incarnational expression. Only the priest is dimly aware of this "Mystery" of the Church, and that his own life is shot through with it. He feels it like a burden almost crushing him in his own unfitness to carry it; he realizes

> "that after a time the mystery became too great, a damned man putting God into the mouths of men" (213)

a somewhat crude way of saying he was unworthy to give to men the Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the central act of the Church on earth.

This tremendous mystery of the Church is what makes both the priest's and the lieutenant's lives tragic. The priest is overwhelmed by his moral doubts. He does not quite understand either his vocation or his ministry. His first idea of becoming a priest was coloured with ambitions to be rich and honoured of men, but now he sees his life is a total contradiction, to the point of becoming a "servant of Satan" rather than a servant of God. He knows that the Church is the "epiphany" of the sacred and he its official representative, but he also knows his

(213) P.G., p.74.

influence is even corrupting children. The darkness of the mystery of the Church is his lot and portion.

The lieutenant can only see the Church as a human institution whose glaring deficiencies he has witnessed since his childhood and which have bred in him such a revulsion that he is ready to struggle might and main so that people forget the Church ever existed. He does not even suspect there is behind the human appearances and human realities of the Church a core of divine mystery.

Both priest and officer are literally "in the dark", and have not pierced to the "luminous grandeur" of the Mystery. Otherwise the former would not feel his life was so utterly useless, and the latter would not stake his all on annihilating the Church. The mystery is largely hidden from all men. No wonder the Church is identified with the clergy, and the clergy are judged by those of the locality: "the Church is Padre José and the whisky priest" (214). They may love the Church or loathe it, but there it is, and without it men would "have been abandoned". With its preferments and dignities and worldly display, the Church is not only the home of faith but also a trial to faith both of clergy and lay people. The other priest mentioned in The Power and the Glory was taken out to be shot and "only at the very end did he remember his prayers", he was too busy trying to impress his captors with his own importance: "He was a monsignor" (215).

(214) Ibid. p.30
(215) Ibid. p.26

The Church in Tabasco, so wretchedly represented, it seems, by a priest devoid of human qualities, has all the signs of death upon it; but it does not entirely succumb, and after the priest's death is renewed by the arrival of another priest. This is the "Paschal Mystery" operating not only inChrist and in the Church at large, but also in the godless state of Tabasco.

It is difficult to understand how the Church will proclaim the Mystery "even to the heavenly powers and principalities" (Eph. 3:10) when the only three priests mentioned in the state are so far from angelic holiness! But Christ, the Founder of the Church, is also the Lord of history, and therefore despite the unworthiness of His instruments his grace is at work and overcomes all obstacles in its preparation of the Kingdom. The Church is, in St. Augustine's phrase, the "whole Christ" whose members - even priests like Padre José and the whisky priest - have a role that will last until the end of time. History itself is a mystery, like God's providence which governs it.

The modern secularization of the west is seen by some theologians as a preparation for a world-wide extension and unification of the Church of Christ; and Communism, despite itself has, in their opinjon, a pre-evangelizing historical mission.

One of the most striking passages in <u>The Power and the Glory</u> with which Greene underlines the distinction between

ministry and personal merit in the minister is where the whisky priest, after confessing to the lieutenant that he is not a saint nor even a brave man, makes the following reflection:

> "That's another difference between us. It's no good your working for your end unless you're a good man yourself. And there won't always be good men in your party. Then you'll have all the old starvation, beating, get-rich anyhow. But it doesn't matter so much my being a coward - and all the rest. I can put God into a man's mouth just the same - and I can give him God's pardon. It wouldn't make any difference to that if every priest in the Church was like me" (216).

God is always the principal Agent in the priestly ministry. He is hidden, but is active. And when, as in times of persecution, the priest himself goes into hiding, God continues to act and his grace extends far beyond visible signs, even sacramental Signs.

Not only is the Church a Mystery, it is also a paradox. She is a Mother that holds in her lap rebels and conformists, shrewd politicians and naïve nuns, "worldly priests and devout anti-clericals", demanding from them an unwavering assent to defined doctrines, but permitting an extraordinary diversity of theological schools. Karl Rahner is of the opinion that in our day "the manifold theological expressions can no longer be supervised and judged by a single small Curial Congregation" (217). The Church is perhaps the hardest community in the world

(216) Ibid. p.253.
(217) K. Rahner, The Tablet (25 October, 1969), p.1058.

to live in, yet all her sons want to die in her lap. It is the Church of beggars and popes, of sinners and saints.

It is a constant temptation of zealous defenders of the Church to think and portray the Church as an abstract reality unmarred by the sinfulness and shortcomings of the members who compose it; they do not stop to realize that the members <u>are</u> the Church, that the Church is the living Community responding with more or less fidelity to the promptings of the Spirit of God, and that we cannot speak of the Church merely in terms of abstract holiness and perfection. The "Ecclesia semper reformanda" became the motto of the Second Vatican Council (218). The "Bride without spot or wrinkle", as St. Paul calls the Church, is the condition of the Church when transformed by the Lord on His return; meanwhile she is the net containing good fish and bad, the field growing wheat and tares.

In <u>The Power and the Glory</u> the author singles out many of the Church's defects, expressing them in the conduct of priests or the criticisms of the lieutenant. The whisky priest thought at one time that his becoming a priest would pave the way to wealth and prestige. At Concepción he wants "to have a better school - and that means a better presbytery too, of course. We are a big parish and the priest has a position to keep up. I'm not thinking of myself but of the Church" (219). The

(218) K. Rahner, op. cit. p.39.

(219) <u>P.G.</u>, p.118.

lieutenant remembers the text "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", but also remembers that the priest would have dinner with the landlord who had confessed to beating or killing a peasant. "That's all finished. He's left it behind in your box" (220). He is a sincere socialist and wants to eliminate starvation not boost the wealth of the clergy. False piety is exemplified in three so-called devout women who seem to have no understanding or willingness to forgive. Gossip is the world they inhabit, especially when it concerns priests. One of these women is a mother who reads to her children a sentimental and idealistic story of a young martyr for the faith. The children are bored, and her son declares "it sounds so silly", but has a sneaking regard for the whisky priest and kisses the hand of the priest who appears from nowhere after the whisky priest's death. The other two are self-centred and spiteful. They remind us of Mr. and Mrs. Rycker in A Burnt-Out Case and Miss Helen in The Living Room.

The Lutheran Mr. Lehr puts his finger on another common defect in the Church:

> "It seems to me you people make a lot of fuss about inessentials" (221)

a remark, written in 1940, when nobody thought of a Second Vatican Council (which confirmed this opinion) has almost an air

(220) Ibid. p.251.

(221) Ibid. p.209.

of prophecy about it. Nowadays we are experiencing a profound renovation in the whole life of the Church, from moral theology and Canon Law to liturgy and pastoral practice. The atmosphere of cramping legalism is now being dissipated and the father of Luis expresses the outlook of the Council when he says: "The Church was here... well, music, light".

Responsibility for the Church's mission must be shared by all its members. Greene expresses the old mistrust of those not in Holy Orders when he says of the priest

> "he had discouraged Montez on the subject of the St. Vincent de Paul society - because you had to be careful not to encourage a layman too far (222)

anticipating the decree on the apostolate of the laity of Vatican II which begins:

> "Wishing to intensify the apostolic activity of the people of God... In fact, modern conditions demand that their apostolate be thoroughly broadened and intensified" (223)

a decree that calls for laymen not merely to be auxiliaries of the clergy but to take the initiative in "restoring all things in Christ", exercising their basic priesthood which they received in Baptism and carrying out the commission for the apostolate conferred upon them in Confirmation.

Another glaring defect is indicated when Greene says of poor old Padre José (before he married) lost among the cathedral

(222) Ibid. p.119.

(223) Walter M. Abbot, S.J. The Documents of Vatican II (London - Dublin: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), pp. 489-490.

clergy:

> "It hadn't been necessary" - to try to pass unnoticed -"none of the busy cathedral clergy even knew what he was called" (224).

Jockeying for position among the clergy and a failure to recognize the essential sublimity of the priesthood in any ordained "Tom, Dick, and Harry", with the consequent flock of ambitious clerics to the big towns in search of sinecures, canonries, and high-sounding ecclesiastical titles - this is what Greene is pointing a finger of scorn at. No wonder the Council speaks of "a proper distribution of priests". And as for the lieutenant:

> "he remembered the smell of incense in the churches of his boyhood, the candles and laziness and self-esteem, the immense demands made from the altar steps by men who didn't know the meaning of sacrifice" (225)

but when face to face with the whisky priest he discovers another facet of the priesthood.

Thus in the novel we are presented with the Church from two different angles: the inner Mystery of a Community inhabited by the Spirit of God active in all its members and beyond the visible limitations of membership in a process of redemption and sanctification, and the outer forms and human realities of governors and governed that share the lot of sinful humanity and human weakness.

A look at some of the statements pronounced by Vatican II will help us to realize how perceptive Graham Greene was when

(224) P.G., p.151. (225) Ibid. p.22

writing The Power and the Glory. The Council was summoned precisely because the insights expressed in the novel were being shared by an ever-increasing number of Catholics, thanks largely to the willingness to listen to criticisms by non-Catholics in an effort to make the Church a worthier instrument of God's grace.

The Church at Vatican II did whatshe had never done authoritatively before - fearing she would be misunderstood - she recognized her sinfulness and begged the forgiveness of all who had been wronged by her in the past. She confessed quite openly that she "will obtain her full perfection only in the glory of heaven" (226), that she is human, not angelic, by nature; that being sent by God to bring the world to God, she shares the defects of the world, but "goes forward together with humanity and experiences the same earthly lot which the world does (227).

> "The Church is aware that among her members, both clerical and lay, some have been unfaithful to the Spirit of God during the course of many centuries. In the present age, too, it does not escape the Church how great a distance lies between the message she offers and the human failings of those to whom the gospel is entrusted" (228).

The ideal would be complete oneness of priestly office and personal holiness, but the Church, as Rahner says

> "perhaps hesitates to move where she should move quickly. Often she is puzzled at God's guidance and decrees and slow to understand them. She is composed of sinful men, of ourselves; she is the

(226) The Documents of Vatican II, ed. cit. p.78.

(227) Ibid. p.239.

(228) Ibid. p.245.

> Church that we do not understand, that bring us bitterness and the cross" (229).

Wealth and luxury in the Church are often the targets of criticism as voiced by the lieutenant. They seem to be a denial of Jesus Christ who revealed His riches in poverty (John 17:5) and shared the lives of the meek and the lowly. They seem to contradict the principle laid down by the masters and finest examples of the spiritual life in the Church, the principle that one must stand before God with empty hands in order to have them filled by God. The unbelieving world is shocked to see the "princes" of the Church live like princes and tycoons of the world. And now the Vatican Council urges religious communities and priests to put evangelical poverty into practice, and requires bishops to give an example of holiness through charity, humility, and simplicity of life (230). To what extent and at what pace the Church will shed the "trappings" of power and thus reinforce the power of truth and love and trust is quite impossible to forecast; it depends on the Church's human responsiveness to the Divine invitation.

The whisky priest remains from the first page of the novel to the last the "stranger", one who is not at home in the world and yet befriends everyone. So too is the Church on earth, she "regards herself as an exile" (231). The Presence of God is

(229) K. Rahner, op. cit. p.83.
(230) The Documents of Vatican II, ed.cit. pp.282, 407, 474, 569...
(231) Ibid. p.20.

revealed by the Church through charity (232), and the Priesthood of Christ is exercised by the Church:

> "Christ continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly interceding for the salvation of the world... by celebrating the Eucharist (233).

The Council "claims no other authority than that of ministering to men with the help of God" - a claim borne out eloquently by the hero of The Power and the Glory. And in announcing the word of God preachers must accommodate the Gospel message to the living conditions of the people to whom they speak, as the whisky priest does in no uncertain manner, such as when he refers to the spying of the police, the soldiers gathering taxes and beating those too poor to pay them.

In The Power and the Glory we come across many reflections on the Church, the priesthood, the individual conscience, the Presence of God in the world where we least expect It, the mixture of good and evil, the hidden ways of grace, the role of the layman in the Church, reflections that were germinating in the Church when the novel was written and which were given authoritative expression at the Council. The idea of service rather than command is basic both to the novel and the Council.

> "In the world, kings lord it over their subjects; and those in authority are called their country's 'Benefactors'. Not so with you: on the contrary, the chief of you like a servant... here am I among you like a servant" (Luke 22:24-27).

(232) Ibid. p.219.

(233) Ibid. p.163.

IV: A TRAGIC VOCATION

1.

The Church is called by St. Paul not only the "Body" of Christ but also the Bride whom Christ loves and cherishes and purifies in this world until She can be presented to Him at His Second Coming "without blemish or wrinkle" in all her splendour (234). The tragedy both of the Church and of her members, especially her priests, is that the very unworthiness of the members is to a great extent the cause of her going unrecognized and being persecuted. Of course, the sinless Christ was persecuted without giving cause, and "if they persecuted me they will persecute you", but the sins of the Church in her members do give cause. Within the Church herself there is a constant tension between the demands for holiness and the clamour of human nature, the voice of the Spirit and the voice of what St. Paul calls "the flesh" - a term that covers human nature, spirit and flesh, in so far as it shows itself intractable to the promptings of the Divine Spirit.

What is still more disturbing is that the world persecutes particularly the more worthy of the Church's members, and therefore the priest who takes his vocation seriously has to be prepared for suffering beyond the ordinary lot of humanity. Only in death is there a birth to new Life in all its splendour; and we this side of the grave are not witnesses of the fulfilment.

(234) Cfr. Ephesians, 5:21-33.

Faith alone enables us to cling to the solemn promise that "having shared His sufferings we shall also share the glory of His resurrection".

When we are introduced to the priest in The Power and the Glory we are told he has been through "eight hard hopeless years", years of spiritual purification during which he goes back over his past with increasing self-condemnation for the unworthy motives of which he declares himself guilty when embracing the life of preparation for the priesthood. But gradually the experience of life's hardships, working on a fundamentally sound character and outlook inspired by Christian faith, fills him with compassion for all who suffer both materially and spiritually, and thus consolidates a once uncertain vocation.

The question as to whether a genuine vocation can grow up in the process of preliminary training for the priesthood which started from the wrong motives is answered in practice by the variety of "enticements" used by Divine Providence to bring young people to hear the call. I know a famous Jesuit who was won over to the idea of the priesthood and the religious life by the chocolates a dear old Jesuit used to give him as a boy after serving his Mass. One thing is a vocation, another are the immediate motives for setting out on the long road leading to the priesthood. Some theologians feel that if anyone became a priest without a vocation, God would give the vocation if he asked for it.

As soon as the whisky priest arrives the first time at a prison cell he is moved "by an enormous and irrational affection for the inhabitants of this prison" (235). He is more and more captured by the thought that "God so loved the world" and wants the salvation of all men, and he as a priest is the instrument God has chosen to save men. He realizes that "no priest, no Church" (236) and therefore if he crosses over to Vera Cruz the means of salvation will decline to vanishing point, at least in the Sacramental order established by Christ.

The priest's longing for the salvation of souls is directed most intensively towards his own natural daughter. His whole emotional life is wrapped up in her spiritual and temporal welfare, and yet he can do so little for her directly because he is ever on the run. He realizes that he should have the same burning zeal for the salvation of all souls, and he looks back with nostalgia to the days before the revolution when people were happy in spite of poverty because "they had at any rate - God". He also longs for peace for himself and for others, but he is ready to forgo his personal peace, even peace of soul, if only he can help others make their peace with God.

St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that blindness of intellect is one of the bitter fruits of lust (237), and this blindness generates indifference to spiritual values. Not so the whisky

(235) P.G., p.163.
(236) F.H. Mountney, "No priest, no Church"(London: The Faith Press, 1968).
(237) St.Thomas, Summa Theol.II-II, q.153, art. 5.

priest. His daughter was conceived in a moment of spiritual weakness, but lust did not take root in him, and her very existence contributes towards making him spiritually more alert. Perhaps he is over-protective towards her, perhaps he still lacks trust in Providence; but one thing is certain, she is "more important to him that a whole continent", and he goes to irrational lengths in his expression of concern for her:

> "O God, give me any kind of death - without contrition, in a state of sin - only save this child" (238)

and even a few moments before his death he exclaims:

> "O God, help her. Damn me, I deserve it, but let her live for ever" (239).

Although emotionally concentrated on Brigitta, his illegitimate daughter who even on the day of her baptism "had been like a rag doll with a wrinkled aged face" and for seven years seemed to have fallen a prey to the world's corruption which disfigured her body and soul "like the dark explicable spot on an X-ray photograph", his compassion extends to all and sundry. His pity for the half-caste is extraordinary. He knows he is bent on betraying for money, he is aware of the trap he leads him into, and "he had only to beat the mule on to leave him stranded in the forest" (240), but he repels the temptation to do so and even asks God's forgiveness for the very thought of

(238) P.G., p.103.
(239) Ibid.p269.
(240) Ibid. p.126.

it. He is quite prepared to sympathize with his betrayer when the latter confesses his evil intentions and pleads in excuse: "A poor man has no choice, Father". He merely dwells on the thought that seven hundred pesos - the blood money - would probably suffice to keep the half-caste going for "a year without anxiety" which might save his soul (241). And when the half-caste is feverish he offers him his own shirt; when at the end of the journey he is tired and hungry, he gives him some of the sandwiches prepared by Miss Lehr. He consoles himself with the thought that "Christ died for this man too".

When the priest is thrown into prison the first time, he meets a woman who, on learning about his reputation, insults him and wants to see him dead. He merely asks her not to be angry but to pray for him, and in return for her insults he wishes her well, and feels a tremendous weight of responsibility for her welfare. (242)

At two critical moments he asks a favour from the married priest Padre José: once when he asks for a night's shelter in his house because he is being pursued by the Red Shirts; the other just before his death when Padre José is asked to go and hear the whisky priest's confession. Both requests were turned down. "You're a good man, José", implored the priest, but the degraded priest replied: "Go and die quickly" and slammed the

(241) Ibid. p.126.
(242) Ibid. 169-170.

door in his face. The second time it is the lieutenant who asks Padre José on behalf of the priest condemned to death and offers him a safe escort, but Padre José refuses to go. And yet the whisky priest finds words of commendation for the other priest and exonerates him from all blame. He realizes that his friend has fallen completely under the power of his domineering legal wife. "Poor man" he mutters (243) as much as to say: he knows he is a priest and, although suspended, can in these circumstances absolve a sinner like me, but he refuses to do so; a woman has proved a stronger influence than his priesthood. And for this cowardly and conformist priest the "stranger" has feelings not of contempt but of unbounded compassion: "Poor man".

The whisky priests pities the blindness of the lieutenant, and yet he realizes how environment can warp a conscience and how the truths of faith can be so utterly obscured by bad example in the Church that a man can in all honesty and rectitude of purpose harness all his energies to the stamping out of the Catholic religion. He glimpses even a heavenly reward for the persecutor!

The schoolmaster who greeted the priest with sarcasm is not excluded either from his benevolence and Christian compassion. He gives him his last forty-five pesos, hoping the gesture will be conducive to his spiritual welfare - if only by accepting it as "conscience money" he will draw the conclusion that priests have a conscience.

(243) Ibid. p.266.

His compassion reaches out even to the brute world. With the starving bitch he shares a miserable bone. After all, both he and the animal were in a condition of distress and abandonment.

In the last prayers of his life the priest remembers all those he had met in his wanderings: the half-caste, the lieutenant, the child at the banana station, the dentist who had had a few minutes conversation and a drink with him. "God help them", he prays, and is aware that they too are in terrible danger. Enemies and friends, he pleads for all as a priest and mediator before God. A stranger in the world himself, all people find in his heart a home. Forgetful of self, even of his own eternal fate, he yearns for others to be saved (244).

There are moments when it appears "as though there were a God for other people and not for him" (245). Like Christ the High Priest and Mediator of our salvation,

> "It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy /high/ priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted" (Heb. 2: 17, 18).

(244) Ibid. p. 87.

(245) Ibid. p.272.

2.

Every priest is a man chosen from among men for the things pertaining to God. So when consciousness of guilt becomes obsessive, as it does through the story of the whisky priest in The Power and the Glory, there is an almost unbearable tension between the demands of holiness on the part of the priestly calling and the awareness of human weakness and sinfulness prompted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Holy Orders do not change the nature of a man, do not give him entry into the ranks of the angelic powers; and yet, so sublime is the priestly function and power that an unworthy priest - especially when the unworthiness is more imaginary than real - feels like "a fallen angel, radiant before but now detestable in God's eyes". This is the case of the whisky priest who says:

> "But I am a bad priest, you see. I know - from experience - how much beauty Satan carried down with him when he fell. Nobody ever said the fallen angels were the ugly ones. Oh no, they were just as quick and light and..." (246).

The ideas of heaven and hell have burned deeply into his mind. His fear of being in the state of mortal sin haunts him day and night. His one escape from damnation seems to lie in deserting the people of Tabasco and crossing over to Vera Cruz where he can obtain absolution from his sins and begin a new life with all the aids to holiness of which he is deprived in Tabasco. That his fears are more imaginary than real, that

(246) Ibid. p.169.

in spite of his real faults - addiction to alcohol and on one occasion lust - he is deep down a dedicated man full of the charity of Christ, all this is of no account as regards the subjective upheaval of his soul. In the lives of the Saints we have instances of this unbearable tension. For example, in the life of the Curé of Ars, St. John Baptist Vianney, a parish priest in France in the nineteenth century, we read of such fearful struggles brought on by his fear of endangering his own salvation through his constant attention to other people that several times he tried to escape from the parish and live like a hermit. The Curé afterwards realized it was a subtle temptation of the Evil One, but at the time his torment was none the less excruciating.

The whisky priest is constantly battling with a similar temptation. And on the eve of his execution he finds himself "empty-handed, with nothing done at all" (247), his priesthood has been a failure, his whole life has been quite useless, without a single soul he can offer to God as proof of the effectiveness of his ministry. He is going to die because, he thinks, he was too proud to conform to Government regulations and get married. And he is sorely tempted to ask for marriage as a way of escaping the firing squad. He is between the cross-fires of heaven and hell, his priestly vocation and the world. So alluring is the thought of escape by consenting to marriage

(247) Ibid. p.273.

that he feels a sudden calm and drops off to sleep. If he consents to a civil marriage in defiance of the Church he would be excommunicated... No, that is impossible, as impossible as to renounce his priesthood.

Young Coral perceived his dilemma and remarked in her artless way: "It's a problem", when he made it quite clear to her that he could never renounce his priestly vocation; but little did she realize the intensity of the struggle within the mind of the poor priest. Little did she - who said she lost her faith at the age of ten - realize the horns of the dilemma: either disbelieve and do as you please, or believe and behave accordingly. But the priest has a more enlightened conscience, and therefore his judgement will be the more severe, both his own self-judgement and God's.

Faith is a human response to what is understood as a divine invitation. The response is both of the intellect and of the will, sometimes evoking sympathetic emotional chords, sometimes accompanied by jarring emotional dissonances, but, especially in the priest, deeply rooted. It is not easy for a priest to give up his faith completely, because his faith and his priesthood are inseparable in practice. And that is why we see Padre José in the novel telling Luis that he is "more of a martyr than the rest" (248), and not just because he has fallen into the clutches of an imperious woman - many

(248) Ibid. p.28.

a man has this trial to bear - but because he realizes he has opted out of the struggle to live up to his faith and his priestly vocation. The use of the term "martyr" in this context is incorrect, because martyrdom implies not only suffering but suffering for a Cause, and Padre José has deserted the Cause. The whisky priest on the other hand has not deserted; he has fallen but has not surrendered, he has yielded to temptation but has not come to terms with it. Graham Greene depicts Padre José as a nonentity who follows like a lamb to the slaughter the voice of the woman calling him to bed while a group of mischievous children peer in through the window and cry in chorus: "Padre José, come to bed". "The little devils" bleats Padre José. But in the author's symbolism they represent the "guardian angels" trying to awaken his dormant conscience (249).

These two priests symbolize the response and lack of response of priests throughout the ages, those who are "killed" by their awareness of their calling, and those who "kill" their consciences. The whisky priest is a "crucified man". The struggle between God and Satan does not give him a moment's rest. His uninterrupted roaming is the outward manifestation of his restless soul, and of the pilgrim Church. Not only in his interior life but also in his human relationships the whisky priest is "crucified" - this word being one of the last

(249) Ibid. p.263.

he utters (250), and applied to Christ, but having a resonance in his own life. The Power and the Glory is a story that could well be entitled: The Priest's Way of the Cross.

Apart from his inner crucifixion of conscience, the hero of the story is caught between his anxious care for his people and the people's fear of the police who are tracking him down. If the people do not betray him, it is largely because of a superstition (251) not out of love for him or genuine belief in his priestly ministrations. Of course there are a few firm believers who are prepared to run risks for their faith, but the majority try to get him to go "further north" (252). It seems that it was only in the houses of non-Catholics - who had nothing to fear from the police - that he could relax (253).

All this aptly symbolizes the "strangeness" of Christ

(250) Ibid. p.273.

(251) The priest advises Maria and the half-caste against superstition, and the lieutenant tells the people not to be afraid of the priest's curses. Greene makes it clear that Catholics have little charity for their priest, in contrast with the Lutherans, Mr. and Miss Lehr: "these were heretics - it never occurred to them that he was not a good man: they hadn't the prying insight of fellow Catholics". This recalls the treatment given to Christ by the Jews and the Samaritans.

(252) "North" may well symbolize Christ the priest's "polestar" or his conscience; but it seems preferable to understand it as a frontier which he should not cross.

(253) P.G., pp. 208, 211.

and his priests in a world where the forces of evil are rampant. Like Christ, he "came to his own home, but his people did not welcome him"; he was a prophet without honour in his own country. But unlike Christ, who knew no sin, the whisky priest felt estranged from God. A threefold persecution assails him: his conscience, the police, and his own people. Rare are his moments of peace, and when they come he welcomes them: "How quiet it is, how safe" (254).

Like most of Greene's leading fictional characters - Pinkie, Scobie, Sarah, Querry, Brown - the whisky priest is on an endless search for peace. "Nervous hilarity" is the first impression he gives. The thought of peace comes to him at the oddest moments, for example, when arrested for violating the anti-liquor laws (255) he thinks of prison and death as destined to give him the peace he could not find in freedom and life. And when Mr. Lehr asks him what he is smiling at, he replies:

> "Only because it seems so - peaceful - here. Prison for a week! " (256).

When he is ministering to the dying gangster, knowing his own death is near, "words like peace, glory, love" come to his mind. When the officer is arraigning the people he feels "an enormous temptation to throw himself in front of the lieutenant and declare himself: 'I am the one you want'," because

(254) Ibid. p.220.
(255) Ibid. p.161.
(256) Ibid. p.211.

he is allured by "a delusive promise of peace" (257).

This continuous searching and never finding of peace symbolizes the Church's unending quest throughout history, the ceaseless struggle with the world, the consciousness both of guilt and of holy treasure to be imparted to the world. When the priest travelled at day-break on his journey to capture and death with the mestizo: the forest

> "was like an armistice with the guns silent on either side: you could imagine the whole world listening to what they had never heard before - peace" (258).

He longs to get away from it all. He longs for absolution from his sins, the only way to peace. And in this he aptly represents the Church Militant groaning in the Spirit to be freed from corruption and transformed into the perfect likeness of her Lord and Bridegroom, but in the meantime forced to carry the burden of her members' sinfulness.

3.

Every man is a stranger in the world, a pilgrim towards something the world cannot give. This is one of the basic themes of the Bible. The psalmist laments:

> "In your house I am a passing guest,
> a pilgrim, like all my fathers" (Ps. 39:12).

The outstanding feature of Greene's landscape is the atmosphere of isolation. Both in Journey without Maps and in

(257) Ibid. p.95. (258) Ibid. p.128.

The Lawless Roads we get this feeling of exile in a foreign land.

Thus, when lost in Mexico in a thunderstorm, Greene says:

> "The lights went out all over the town, one had to find one's way back slowly to the hotel by the lightning flashes; the streets were empty and the rain came down. Did one turn left or right? It was like being forgotten in a maze when the ticket man has gone home" (259).

If every man is a pilgrim, the priest is especially so. He is uprooted and seems to belong to nobody and nowhere. Like Melchizedek who suddenly appears in the Book of Genesis "without father or mother or genealogy" (Heb. 7:3), so too the priest in The Power and the Glory. He stands for the Church on earth "journeying in a foreign land away from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:6) and regarding herself as an exile (260). The Gerasenes beside the Lake of Galilee asked Jesus to depart from them "for they were seized with great fear" when their pigs hurtled down the cliffs into the lake. The villagers of Tabasco, afraid of the police, urge the priest to go elsewhere. Even Maria treats him as a stranger, and his daughter despises him "with an impudent malicious gesture" (261). He is "like a man without a passport who is turned away from every harbour" (262).

(259) Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads, ed. cit. p.55.
(260) The Documents of Vatican II, ed. cit. p.20.
(261) The Power and the Glory, p.84.
(262) Ibid. p.131.

He is a man branded for life by his priesthood - "like a birthmark" (263).

The glaring contrast that often exists between the priest's profession and his practice is not the only reason for the criticism and even hostility to which the priest is subjected. Even those priests who are models of virtue are often treated with animosity to the point of persecution. If, as Aquinas says, Satan has his own kind of "mystical body" (264) in the world whose forces are pledged to do battle with the Mystical Body of Christ, it is not surprising that the priest should be singled out for opposition. It is not surprising that the lieutenant and the whisky priest, although similar in many ways, should be diametrically opposed in their aims:

> The lieutenant: You're a danger. That's why we kill you. I have nothing against you, you understand, as a man.
> The priest: Of course not. It's God you're against (265).

The priest is a stranger in the world on account of his priesthood, and the present novel is from beginning to end a commentary on the words of Jesus:

> "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:19).

(263) Ibid. p.47.
(264) St. Thomas, Summa Theol. III, q.8, art. 7.
(265) P.G.,pp.250-251.

The tragedy of the priest is to be a citizen of two worlds. As a man, he is polite, educated, kindly, etc. and as such he is in a way befriended by the lieutenant; but as a priest, as God's ambassador, he is the greatest obstacle to a humanistic world devoid of the supernatural, and therefore the chief enemy. The very holiness of a priest is a source of disturbance for human pride and self-seeking, but when the priest appears sinful and degraded, then opposition seems to be justified - but the real target is the priesthood not the unworthiness of the priest.

4.

In the state of Tabasco the whisky priest is pursued more relentlessly by his conscience than by the police. But it is a conscience in the grip of ambiguity. Should he escape over the border and thus, as he thinks, save his own soul by getting absolution for his sins and returning to the regular exercise of the ministry, or should he stay behind to serve the scattered and harried flock at the risk of his own condemnation, without the normal means of salvation at his disposal?

A chorus of friendly voices advises him to go if he wants to survive both physically and spiritually. Coral tells him "You had better go north" (266). Another voice says: "It's no good staying, father... Better go north, to the mountains (267).

(266) Ibid. p.45. (267) Ibid. p.98.

A third voice: "It's a fine state over the border" (268). Border, frontier, north are three words constantly enticing the priest to give up what he thinks is a hopeless task. They are the siren voices that resound all through the story.

> "If I go I shall meet other priests; I shall go to confession; I shall feel contrite and be forgiven; eternal life will begin for me all over again. The Church taught that it was every man's first duty to save his own soul" (269).

But on the other hand he is, apart from Padre José who refuses to exercise the ministry, the only priest left in Tabasco. And although he is convinced he is not in a fit condition spiritually to say Mass and give the Sacraments to people, if he leaves, Christ will not be among His people in the Eucharist and in the preaching of the word of God; the people will be in extreme spiritual need, both those who need the priest for their conversion - if only on their death beds - and for the few who must be nourished with the Eucharist if they are to persevere in their Christian Faith during a time of dire persecution.

A man's conscience is a mystery, and nobody knows its intricacies like a priest. He not only has to obey his own conscience when it clearly commands, and try to discern the voice of conscience from the voices of instinctual self-seeking or self-defence; he also has to be able to guide other people

(268) Ibid. p.99.

(269) Ibid. p.80.

to come to a decision in keeping with the laws of rational nature and the promptings of the Divine Spirit. And it sometimes happens - we have several instances in the lives of the Saints - that whereas a priest can be an expert guide for others, in his own personal matters he is blind and needs another to guide him. The whisky priest, bearing in mind Christ's words to the first disciples, that if persecuted in one place they should take refuge in another, has no difficulty in defending the action of those priests who escaped when persecution broke out. "They went; they were quite right to go", he tells the lieutenant (270). But he thinks his own case is different, and he knows from his study of moral theology that circumstances cannot make an intrinsically evil thing right, but make all the difference when dealing with something that in itself, in abstract, is neither good nor evil. To escape from danger of death is in itself a natural and morally neutral thing; it all depends on circumstances to pronounce it morally good or bad. So he is in a quandary about himself. Should he forget about himself, about his own personal health and happiness and even his spiritual welfare, and try to be of some help to others in distress, or should he "save his own soul" first?

Graham Greene, in posing and continually harping upon this dilemma, brings up a transcendental problem: How far can a Christian, and especially a priest, think of his own

(270) Ibid. p.253.

salvation in isolation from other people? And how far are the Sacraments necessary for salvation? Anyone can, in an emergency, baptize; only the priest can bring about Christ's Sacramental Presence in the Eucharist, and "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall have no life in you"; and yet "God wishes all men to be saved" and all theologians are agreed that God does not refuse His grace to anyone who does his best to follow his conscience.

Several times the priest "had tried to escape, but he had always been prevented" (271), and sometimes he seems to strike a bargain with God:

> "This time, if he escaped from the prison, he would escape altogether" (272)

because, seeing his escape from prison most unlikely, he would take it as a sign from God if he did go free. It would be a sign, he thinks, that his bad example is doing more harm than his occasional hearing of confessions does good. But on one occasion, when he has actually crossed the frontier, he returns. In his conscience there is an undertow of grace keeping him from running away.

> "I shall miss it", he said, "I am meant to miss it" (273).

And that day the ship "Obregón" whistled twice, as if to tell

(271) Ibid. p. 79.
(272) Ibid. p.171.
(273) Ibid. p. 14.

the priest he was missing his great opportunity in spite of himself:

> "He felt an unwilling hatred of the child ahead of him and the sick woman - he was unworthy of what he carried" (274)

referring to the sick-call that reached him just before he was about to embark. And later, when hostages are being taken because of him he offers only one reason for not going elsewhere:

> "It's not what you want or what I want" (275)

even though Maria quite bluntly tells him he is doing no good by staying (276). Moreover when he does say Mass, it is a deep experience both for himself and for those present:

> "Everything in time became a routine but this - 'Who the day before He suffered took bread into His holy and venerable hands...' - Whoever moved outside on the forest path, there was no movement here - 'Hoc est enim Corpus meum'. He could hear the sigh of breaths released: God was here in the body for the first time in six years" (277).

Here lies his vocation and here is the source of strength not to escape over the border and leave the poor people bereft.

Divine Providence makes use of the most unlikely times and places and people to ensure that the priest does not quit. The first time it was a little child begging the priest to attend a sick woman; another time it was the half-caste traitor

(274) Ibid. p. 18.
(275) Ibid. p. 78.
(276) Ibid. p. 99.
(277) Ibid. p. 88.

informing him of an American gangster's dying request. Another time the rains had set in and ruined the escape routes. Then there was the nagging remorse about his daughter whom he could not in conscience abandon. One can follow a process of conscience formation in the priest, a process whereby the priest gradually makes up his mind to stay because he gradually sees it is God's Will. When he goes to the gangster he is aware it is a trap and openly asks: "Have you brought the soldiers with you?" (278). And when the 'mestizo accuses him of wanting to escape, he replies:

"Why do you think me such a fool?"

because he knows why the traitor had turned up again. The scrap of paper with the words "For Christ's sake, father..." (279) written in English, did not fool him, but the thought of a man dying in mortal sin and a priest refusing to tender him Christ's forgiveness was too much for him. He allowed himself to be guided by the half-caste to the hut where the gangster was dying - and where the lieutenant and his men were waiting. He was being guided by Christ who with sovereign freedom gave Himself up to His persecutors (280)

(278) Ibid. p.229.
(279) Ibid. p.232.
(280) The transcendent significance of the frontier can be traced to Greene's childhood when he inhabited two countries separated by a border dividing mother-love and home and rest from Collifax and school discipline and duties. Hate and love; good and evil; God and Satan. "One became aware of God with an intensity" says Greene.

5.

Martyrdom is the supreme act of fortitude and of supernatural charity (281). It is a kind of moral miracle because it is the effect of an extraordinary intervention of God in the realm of grace. Consequently, it would be presumption for a man to court martyrdom without a special inspiration from God; it would mean exposing oneself recklessly to the danger of apostasy.

The whisky priest shows by his conduct that he is familiar with the theology of martyrdom. After so much wandering and suffering he is almost impatient to meet his death: "Let me be caught soon... Let me be caught" (282). But he does not throw away his chances of eluding his pursuivants, because "martyrs are holy men" (283) and he is far from holy; and if he did die because of his priesthood, he agrees with the woman in prison who remarked that his martyrdom would "bring mockery upon the Church" (284), and that is the first and most terrible thing he wants to avoid. He would rather be caught, he says to Coral, than continue as a sorrow-stricken fugitive, but when she suggests that he just give himself up, he replies:

(281) Et secundum hoc patet quod martyrium inter caeteror actus humanos est perfectior secundum suum genus, quasi maximae caritatis signum; secundum illud Joan. 15:13: Majorem caritatem nemo habet quam ut animam suam ponat quis pro amicis suis" (St. Thomas, Summa Theol. II-II, q.124, a.3).
(282) P.G., p.18.
(283) Ibid. p.163.
(284) Ibid. p.163.

> "There's the pain. To choose pain like that - it's not possible. And it's my duty not to be caught" (285).

The priest believes in miracles - but not for the benefit of the likes of him (286). He wants at all costs to prevent hostages being taken on his account from his native village, and even tells the people it is their job to inform on him if they have no other means of avoiding death themselves, but they should not expect him to give himself up unless he has also been recognized:

> "If I have been seen I will give myself up. I assure you no one shall get into trouble because of me" (287).

The priest is willing to die. To make it easier for people to point him out to the lieutenant he keeps his eyes cast down - he knows how superstitious they are - and thus no one will fear a priest's curse for having denounced him. His readiness to die takes on a heroic trait when he offers himself as a hostage, on the plea that he is too old to work in the fields around the village. He does not reveal himself to be a priest, he merely states a fact.

Although he naturally recoils from death, or rather from the pain of dying, death is "beginning to attract him by its simplicity" (288), and he begins "to pay his farewell to the world" (289).

.....

(285) Ibid. pp.46-47.
(286) Ibid. p.260.
(287) Ibid. p.206.
(288) Ibid. p.161.
(289) Ibid. p.172.

We might ask here whether the whisky priest dies a real martyr's death. Three conditions are required for martyrdom:

a) a person must undergo death or very serious injury;

b) death or injury must be inflicted because of the person's Christian faith or his defence of some Christian virtue;

c) the person has to submit to death or grievous injury with patience and without aggression or self-defence (290).

The first condition was fulfilled in the whisky priest when he was put against the wall and shot. The second is proven by dozens of passages throughout the story: it is the priesthood as such that is persecuted, not Father A or Father B; the whisky priest "looks like the rest" (291), according to the lieutenant when asked to pick him out of a number of priests in a photograph, and "they have shot him half a dozen times" (292)- "him" meaning the priest in general, any priest representing the Church, personifying the Church. Hence the whisky priest is identified by the lieutenant with a Church that he detests and is bent on destroying because he remembers "the immense demands made from the altar steps" and at the same time the children starving because of the greediness of the Church (293).

(290) "Martyrium est perpessio lethalis cruciatus in odium fidei, vel ob virtutis christianae exercitium, inflicti et patienter tolerati" (Francisco Solá, Sacrae Theologiae Summa (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1956) vol. IV, p.161).

(291) P.G., p.21.

(292) Ibid p.22.

(293) Ibid. pp. 93 and 250.

The priest as an individual means nothing to him, but as an agent of the Enemy, he does more harm than any gangster who robs and murders. The Church, thinks the lieutenant, is the primary cause of people's misery, therefore his ambition is to see the day when "they'll forget there ever was a Church here". "Everything will be fine when <u>they</u> are dead" (294). "They" are the priests. The whisky priest is one of "them" - and the last surviving active one in the state of Tabasco. Padre José has been rendered inactive and harmless as a priest.

But the tragedy of the situation is heightened still further by a secret fellow-feeling between the whisky priest and the lieutenant. They admire each other. They become almost friends. But duty calls: the officer's duty is to kill the Church; the priest's is to bear witness, not to the sinfulness of so many of the Church's members, priests and lay people, but to the holiness and divine institution of the Church and her mission of redemption to mankind. The following excerpt from a dialogue between the two men is most revealing:

> "Lieutenant: You're a danger. That's why we kill you. I have nothing against you, you understand, as a man.
>
> Priest: Of course not. It's God you're against. I'm the sort of man you shut up every day - and give money to.
>
> Lieutenant: I don't fight against a fiction.
>
> Priest: But I'm not worth fighting, am I? You've said so. A liar, a drunkard. That man's worth a bullet more than I am.

(294) Ibid. p.93.

Lieutenant: It's your ideas"(295).

Thirdly, the priest goes to his death patiently, like a lamb. When the lieutenant says to him on his arrival at the hut where the American is dying: "You didn't expect to see me", the priest replies:

> "Oh, but I did... I must thank you forletting me stay alone with him" (296).

And when the gangster says to the priest: "You take my gun, father", the calm rejoinder is:

> "I haven't any use for a gun" (297).

There is no doubt about it. The whisky priest fulfils the three main conditions for martyrdom. He himself confesses to being a coward, and when he is led to the place of execution we are told that

> "You could tell he was doing his best - it was only that his legs were not fully under control" (298)

which was not surprising after having drunk a whole bottle of brandy the night before in his prison cell. It robbed his martyrdom of all glamour - such as often surrounds the martyrs' deaths as told in hagiography - but not its substance. In himself, after a moment of uncaring, he is plunged again into desolation, thinks of "the faces of the saints rejecting him"; but there dawns suddenly a deep peace of soul, and for the

(295) Ibid. pp. 250-251.
(296) Ibid. p.246.
(297) Ibid. p.244.
(298) Ibid. p.281.

first time in many years he is not afraid of being damned, and yet his whole life appears to him like a caricature of service, and he feels desperately sorry for not being a saint.

He dies not so much pardoning as asking his enemies for pardon. His very last word "sounded like 'excuse'" (299); either he asked pardon for the bad example he had given, or for just giving trouble to other people.

There is much excitement in the town (300) the day he is executed, and he is shot in the prison courtyard instead of the usual place of execution, the cemetery, in order to avoid a demonstration. The reactions to the priest's death are many and surprising. Padre José and others speak of him as "a good man" (301) and "a saint" (302). Many people call him a martyr (303). Mr. Fellows says his daughter Coral was completely changed after meeting the priest - "as if he'd told her things". Mr. Tench is horrified when he looks out of the window and sees the priest held up by two policemen to be shot, and a feeling of desolation comes over him and makes him decide to return to England for good. Luis' mother who had previously despised the priest for his drinking now calls him a hero and perhaps a saint. Luis, who had previously been bored by the

(299) Ibid.p.281.
(300) Ibid.p.275.
(301) Ibid.pp.239, 255, 265.
(302) Ibid. pp.53, 239.
(303) Ibid.pp.163, 254.

reading of the lives of the Saints, realizes they had received a hero into the home, and his affection for the lieutenant turns to loathing. As the officer passes by he crinkles up his face and spits on the lieutenant's revolver butt. And the latter tries to muffle his conscience by saying at every step on his way from the execution: "I have done what I have done" (304) - in imitation of Pontius Pilate.

In death the priest is a loss to everyone, whereas in life he was a burden to all. Here begins the "glory" of an "appalling sinner" who in his earthly pilgrimage was vested with the power to make the Hidden God present among men - present in the Eucharist, and present in his own dying.

(304) Ibid. p.286.

V: THE GRACE OF GOD IS EVERYWHERE

Graham Greene's underlying idea in The Power and the Glory, and indeed in all his "Catholic" writings, is simply that the supernatural gift of God which we call "grace" is offered to all men and in all circumstances, for men to accept of their own free will, or to reject. "God's about on earth" (305) is the terse expression of this truth. Traditional Catholic theology emphasizes that "supernatural" means a Self-disclosure and Self-giving on the part of God beyond the capacities of natural wisdom and natural love whether of men or of angels; only God can give this grace and only God can make a human being capable of receiving it and corresponding to its promptings. Theology speaks of "actual" grace when referring to the "passing" or transitional action of God by way of mental stimuli or urges. It calls "habitual" grace that "lasting" condition of the person who responds to God's promptings at least in fundamentals and is in a relationship with God marked by charity or love for God and for all God's creatures in so far as the latter are enfolded in God's love for them. A "mortal" sin would be a breaking away from God's love by a deliberate and unrepented act of preferring oneself to God, a preference shown by transgressing one of God's basic commandments with malice aforethought. A "venial" sin is a lesser transgression, at least subjectively, which may "cool" one's relationship towards God, but does not break with Him.

(305) Ibid. p.260.

God never deserts a man in this life. He is Present and Prompting even in the midst of sin and when nothing visible seems to point to Him. But He is most powerfully Present and Active in those effective Signs of grace, the Sacraments, and in the Church which is the collective Sign of divine grace.

The "power" of grace is shown most perfectly in martyrdom, that complete self-surrender to God of all that one naturally most tenaciously clings to, one's life, in order to affirm categorically one's adherence to belief in God and to God's law. The whisky priest's dilemma was that whereas he suffered persecution and was the occasion of others being persecuted because of his adherence to Christ's command to teach and baptize and give His Body and Blood in the Eucharist and make vital supernatural contact with Him through the other Sacraments, he himself had fallen from grace, so he thought, and was "in the state of mortal sin" (306). And this highlights Greene's thesis of the ubiquity of grace even though the instruments of grace may be riddled with moral weakness.

Vatican II declares that God's help is always present "not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way" (307); a truth that Greene exemplified many years before the Council (which merely gave authentic expression to traditional theological convictions) when dealing with characters like Scobie and Rose whose suicide seemed to point to damnation but who before dying were heard

(306) Ibid. p.163.
(307) The Documents of Vatican II, op. cit. p.221.

to mutter words like "Dear God, I love..." (308) and who, in Fr. James' reflexion, were still in God's keeping:

> "If He exists, He loved her too, and saw her take that senseless drink. And you don't know and I don't know the amount of love and pity He's spending on her now" (309).

The "hidden ways of God" are often commented upon in The Power and the Glory. The priest rebukes the rash judging by the woman in prison of those who were behaving immorally in one corner: "We don't know. It may be" - a mortal sin, he tells her. And this fully accords with the Conciliar statement:

> "God alone is the judge and searcher of hearts" (310).

The Mercy of God, like God Himself, is beyond our comprehension. And frequently the whisky priest acknowledges his inability to set any bounds to God's Mercy:

> "I don't know a thing about the mercy of God; I don't know if there's ever been a single man in this state damned..." (311).

Even when he meets what one might consider a hardened, unrepentant sinner, like James Calver who was arrested for robbing a bank and for homicide, and was shot after refusing to confess his sins, the priest trusts in God's Mercy:

> "O merciful God, after all he was thinking of me, it was for my sake" (312)

(308) Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.326.
(309) Graham Greene, Three Plays (London: Mercury Books, 1962), p.69.
(310) The Documents of Vat. II, op. cit. p.227.
(311) P.G., p.259.
(312) Ibid. p.245.

that Calver had several times advised the priest to run away and to take his gun.

And yet, with regard to himself, the priest is tempted to think he is beyond the scope of the divine mercy, as though a merciful God "were a God for other people and not for him", while aware that God works through priests however sinful they may be. He therefore felt acutely the need of God's grace.

It is a case of naked faith divested of all emotion and shrouded in darkness. Throughout the story we see him a prey to "monstrous bitterness" (313), carrying a fearful burden of remorse, and plagued with the idea of his uselessness to God and man. At the remembrance of his past life, on the last night before his execution, we see him "beating his head gently against the wall" while "tears poured down his face" (314) trying to utter an act of contrition: "O God, I am sorry... and beg pardon for all my sins... crucified... worthy of thy dreadful punishments (315). We are reminded of Christ's bitter grief of soul for the sins of the world and His prostrate figure in the garden of olives.

The whisky priest was never a man of compromise. He abhors flabbiness and routine in the spiritual life, the very defects of which he accuses himself when he says that "the routine of his life like a dam was cracked" and its effect was to make him

(313) Ibid. p. 15.
(314) Ibid. p.273.
(315) Ibid. p.273.

forget his most sacred duties.

False piety was to him a kind of unforgivable sin. God might forgive the most horrible crimes, "but was it possible to forgive the habit of piety?.. It excluded everything but evening prayer and the Guild meeting and the feel of humble lips on your gloved hand" (316). The pharisaic piety of the woman in the prison could be more obnoxious, he thought, than the cunning treachery of the half-caste, because women like her are "extraordinarily foolish over pictures" and approach "death so often in a state of invincible complacency, full of uncharity" (317). He was genuinely worried about that woman.

He also unmasks the seriousness of venial sins. He knows from experience how venial sins can lead on to a mortal sin; before he sinned with Maria he had been neglecting prayer.

> "That was another mystery: it sometimes seemed to him that venial sins - impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity - cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all" (318)

A sudden grave sin, unprepared for by venial sins, can cause a real shock to the conscience and engender salutary repentance, but the gradual diminishing of charity through routine and venially sinful habits leads to a serious breach without stirring the conscience. A spiritual torpor takes hold

(316) Ibid. p.218.
(317) Ibid. p.164.
(318) Ibid. p.180.

of a person whose habitual venial sins have robbed one of alertness, vitality, and decision; hence the words of Revelation:

> "I know all about you: how you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other, but since you are neither, but only lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:15-16).

At this point we may ask two questions: Is the whisky priest, as described in The Power and the Glory, in the state of grace? And: Has he in the past really been guilty of mortal sin?

I maintain, in answer to the first question, that the very first chapter reveals the priest as endowed with heroic faith and supernatural charity: he had been making "periodic attempts at escape", but when he learns of a woman dying, he deliberately misses the boat in order to go and give the woman the Sacraments of the Church. "It always seems to happen", he remarks. "Like this... I shall miss it.. I am meant to miss it". Which means that on several occasions previously he has exposed himself to extreme danger and hardship in order to remain faithful to the démands of his priestly ministry. And such a heroic act, almost "habit", of charity is incompatible with the state of mortal sin. To him may be applied the words of Christ: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (John 15:13). And this has been the priest's lot for "eight hard hopeless years" of bitter grief, abandonment, and of desire for death as a happy release - a condition of profound humility and all-embracing charity that cancels out sin

and spells the triumph of grace.

The guilt-complex of the priest and his ever-readiness to accuse himself even in public of the most hideous crimes are afflictions he has to bear in his poor state of health and in the appalling circumstances prevailing in the "hell" of Tabasco. He is bearing the burden of his people's sins, like a true Victim of Atonement, like a true priest, like his Master. His longing for Absolution does not mean he forgets the simple doctrine that anyone is forgiven by God as soon as he is sincerely repentant, even before going to Confession; but perhaps it does mean that because he does not <u>feel</u> the emotions of repentance, therefore he thinks he <u>is</u> not repentant, and therefore only the Sacrament will enable him to repent. It is a case of scrupulosity that can afflict the greatest saints.

What about the priest's past life? There are two occasions (319) when we are given a glimpse of his serious examination of conscience and four matters that give rise to exceptional remorse. He dispensed with the altar-stone when celebrating Mass; he left his breviary behind and stopped saying his Office; he got drunk; and he had sexual intercourse with a woman while he was in a state of inebriation. What of these lapses?

One of the most basic principles of moral theology is that human acts have to be seen in the light of circumstances not

(319) Ibid. pp. 73-74, 253-254.

merely in the abstract; moral theology deals with sinners rather than with sins, just as medicine deals with patients rather than disease. Imputability depends on the person's knowledge of the sinfulness of an act, on his freedom of will to do or refrain from the act, and on the nature of the act itself. Inculpable ignorance or lack of freedom can reduce imputability even to nothing. Positive human laws enacted by the Church can cease to bind when their observance might bring more harm than good, or more hardship than the Church would wish to attach to their observance.

We are told that "the altar-stone was too dangerous to carry with him", wandering as he was from place to place and hunted down by the police; so, whatever the gravity of the general precept to use an altar-stone for Mass, the priest's circumstances completely exonerated him for not obeying it. As regards the breviary: he leaves it at Mr. Tench's, but we are not informed whether this was by design or through forgetfulness (320). It was disguised by being wrapped in a book cover bearing the romantic title "La Eterna Mártir" (321) and had been carried about for eight years. The recitation of the Office was, in normal circumstances, considered to be a grave obligation for a priest, but not in those of Tabasco. He accuses himself of having "ceased to trouble more than occasionally about his breviary" (322) and in the circumstances that

(320) Ibid. p.73.
(321) Ibid. p.16.
(322) Ibid. p.73.

occasional trouble may well have meant an extraordinary effort that the laws of the Church did not demand. Here again it may be a matter of excessive sensitiveness of conscience.

But drunkenness and fornication are very serious sins in themselves, and it may seem hard to acquit the priest of mortal sin. But what are the circumstances? The appalling heat, the physical and moral wretchedness of the place, hunger and fatigue, hatred and contempt, constant fear of being caught, and all the weight of sadness, loneliness, remorse of conscience, temptation to escape, etc. they all invite the priest to drink in order to forget his woes and to give him that stimulation to his nervous system to enable him to carry on. Drink becomes for the priest a physical necessity, and his system becomes an easy prey to addiction. The day before he dies he accuses himself: "I have been drunk - I don't know how many times" (323), but we may ask: how drunk? Was it a matter of mild inebriation to the point of merriment so as not to succumb to despondency?

On one occasion it was to the point of committing the sin of fornication. What of this?

The operative word in his confession to the lieutenant is the word "because":

> "...and one day because I was drunk and lonely - well, you know how it was, I got a child" (324).

(323) Ibid. p.270.
(324) Ibid. p.254.

It was not the culmination of a real "love affair"; it was done while drink had lowered his powers of resistance; it was more an instinctive act than a premeditated one. Objectively it was grievously sinful, but subjectively there are grounds for thinking he did not incur full culpability. The sequel is also revealing. Maria never calls the priest by his name, she always uses the reverential name: Father. Their relationship was an isolated "incident", however regrettable, which did not, it seems to me, imply that radical disorientation of the personality that mortal sin implies. Moreover, the priest refers to this as his "first mortal sin", and on this he concentrates all his regret, especially because of the fruit of his sin, that bastard daughter whom he loves so much with all her physical and moral deformities.

This means that when the priest faces the firing squad because he is a priest, he does so with a life unmarred by grievous sin, with the robe of his baptismal innocence essentially intact. His supreme act of charity in martyrdom is the peak of a long winding path strewn with heroic acts of love. It is the Calvary that ends the Way of the Cross.

No matter what the priest may think and feel of himself, here is a man who reproduces in a wonderful manner the likeness of Christ and also truly represents the Church - human in his weakness, divine in his strength. And this is the secret of the Power and the Glory that will follow in the Kingdom beyond

this world. Grace did not desert him, but found him even in his weakness. And God's grace does not desert anyone, but searches everyone out, even in the midst of sin and sorrow, and especially in sin and sorrow. This is the great Grace of Redemption.

VI: "THE POWER AND THE GLORY" AS A METAPHYSICAL PARABLE

Theologians say that the only way to approach the world of supernatural grace is by analogy (325). Metaphors and parables, protracted metaphors, belong eminently to the language of theology (326). A parable or allegory is used to illustrate by means of imaginary characters and settings a vital truth pertaining theologically to the realm of the invisible and intangible.

Roger Sharrock writes:

> "When art goes beyond representation, whether in stories, reflections on life, or visual imitations, it makes use of symbols; symbols are associated with the ritual of religion and are inseparable from the central acts of Christianity" (327).

(325) Cfr. for example, St.Thomas Aquinas: "Dicendum est igitur quod huiusmodi nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis secundum analogiam, id est proportionem... Et iste modus communitatis medius est inter puram aequivocationem et simplicem univocationem. Neque enim in is quae analogice dicuntur, est una ratio, sicut est univocis, nec totaliter diversa, sicut est univocis, nec totaliter diversa, sicut in aequivocis; sed nomen quod sic multipliciter dicitur, significat diversas proportiones ad aliquid unum" (S.Theol. i.q.13.art. 5).

(326) "respondeo dicendum quod conveniens est sacrae Scripturae divina et spiritualia sub similitudine corporalium traderе. Deus enim omnibus providet secundum quod competit eorum naturae. Est naturale homini ut per sensibilia ad intelligibilia veniat: quia omnis nostra cognitio a sensu initium habet. Unde convenienter in sacra Scriptura traduntur nobis spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium... Convenit etiam sacrae Scripturae, quae communiter omnibus proponitur... ut spiritualia sub similitudinibus corporalium proponantur" (St. Thomas, Summa Theol. I,q.1, art.9).

(327) Roger Sharrock, "Fables and Symbols", New Blackfrairs (February 1969), p.233.

In The Power and the Glory expression is given by way of analogy to the vital truths held by the Catholic Church, viz: the priest's supernatural function does not depend on his human qualities (328); God acts upon the soul of man in the most mysterious manner, through the covenanted means of the institutional Church and through a myriad uncovenanted ways including His apparent Absence; the Church is always being hunted down and is always triumphant.

Throughout the novel we are confronted with the natural and the supernatural (not preternatural) placed in some sort of contrast or opposition. Except for a few allusions to some of the stock themes of Graham Greene, e.g. the corruption of children, unhappy marriages, etc. the rest of the book is symbolism.

At the outset we are introduced to "the stranger", repeated eighteen times in the first chapter, and since names represent things or persons, this continual use of the anonymous term applied to a man whom we learn is a priest builds up the idea of the essential "strangeness" of the priest in the world. Not just this particular priest but every priest fashioned in the image and likeness of Christ our High Priest. Identity with Christ is the mark of every priest's identity; and that means

(328) "I think The Power and the Glory was the only novel I have written to a thesis... I could distinguish even then between the man and his office". Graham Greene, "In the footsteps of a Priest", The Daily Telegraph Magazine, number 338, April 16, 1971, p.46; and The Power and the Glory, Collected edition (London: Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1971) pp. ix - x.

identification with the Church that Christ founded and ever sustains to continue His priestly work on earth. Therefore the "stranger" in the last analysis is Christ Himself - "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me" (Mt. 25:43). It is Christ the Suffering Servant of God and God's people:

> "Behold my servant, whom I uphold... He will never cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street" (Isaia. 42:1-2).

The prophet predicts the inconceivable humiliations of the "Servant of Yahweh" who would bear the burden of the world's sinfulness and make atonement. And in The Power and the Glory we meet the priest who is "the slave of his people" (329), "somebody you could command to do anything... ready to go, ready to stay" (330):

"Oh, let them come. Let them all come", the priest cried angrily. "I am your servant" (331). And like Christ, he was beset with humiliations, despised, rejected, a man of sorrows (332).

The observation that "the priest cried angrily" hints at the tension in the priest's soul. He knew he was destined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, but his natural self

(329) P.G., p.18.
(330) Ibid. p.12.
(331) Ibid. p.53.
(332) "His appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men" (Is. 52:14). "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Is. 53:3).

protested, and still had a long way to go before he fully resembled his Master of whom Isaia prophesied:

> "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; (Is. 53:4 - 7).

The prophet Jeremia expresses the hatred of sinners for the man of God and their ambition to erase his memory from the world (333). The man of God is tempted to lose courage and to think all his efforts useless (334), but he continues with the struggle until death, knowing that power and glory will eventually be made manifest. In the New Testament St. Paul stresses that God "sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

When we read <u>The Power and the Glory</u> we must keep in mind these pivotal texts which have their perfect fulfilment in Jesus Christ, and also a partial fulfilment in the "whisky priest".

The similarities between Christ and His minister are numerous: Christ "came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (John 1:11) - the whisky priest is "like a man without passport who is turned away from every harbour" (335).

(333) "Let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more" (Jer. 11:19).
(334) "I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity" (Is. 49:4) - compare with the whisky priest's: "If I hadn't been so useless, useless..." (<u>P.G.</u>, p.270).
(335) <u>P.G.</u>, p.131.

Christ came to die; the priest is under sentence of death, by the Civil Authorities, from the first page of the story. Christ in His Passion "was beyond human semblance", and the priest looked "disreputable", with a "charred face", a "stubby beard", "dressed in a shabby" suit of clothes. The deserter priest, Padre José, tells the whisky priest:

"Go and die quickly. That's your job" (336)

like the High Priest who said: "It is expedient that one man should die lest all the people perish" (John 11:50). When death approaches Christ undergoes a most painful agony and even sweats blood; and when the priest faces imminent death he cries out lamenting his unworthiness. His little daughter, symbolizing the whole world, needs to be ransomed. Hearing people advise him to escape before the police arrest him, he replies: "It's not what you want or I want" that matters, like Christ in His agony saying: "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, Thy Will be done" (Mat. 26:42). His last prayer was an act of sorrow for sin by which he deserved to be abandoned by God, just as Christ's last words from the cross were from psalm 22: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And as Christ was crucified between two criminals, the whisky priest was shot in the prison courtyard and left as a "routine-heap" of "something unimportant" to be cleared away.

Christ, in the words of Isaia and John the Baptist, is

(336) Ibid. 152.

the "Lamb of God" as well as the Shepherd of the flock, the Victim as well as the Priest offering the Victim. The priest hero of Greene's story reproduces this same dual aspect as a man of sorrows and consoler of others in sorrow, as a man burdened with his own weaknesses and, unlike Christ, his own moral failures, but at the same time imparting strength to others by giving them the Mass and the Sacraments. He dies to all appearances a malefactor, an enemy of the people - as the socialist state would name him - but in fact he proves to be the people's greatest benefactor.

The Power and the Glory is a priest's via crucis to martyrdom closely modelled on the Passion of Christ.

Christ longs for the redemption of the world through His death: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15); the priest longs to be arrested: "Let me be caught soon... Let me be caught" (337). The chief priests, with the elders and scribes, meet to plot against Jesus (Mark 15:1), and likewise the chief of police and the lieutenant conspire against the priest (338). The chief priests and the pharisees wanted to betray Jesus "but when they tried to arrest him they feared the multitudes" (Mat. 21:46); and so too did the police fear the superstition of the people when they tried to get the priest (339).

(337) Ibid. p. 18.
(338) Ibid. pp.67-68.
(339) Ibid. p. 76.

Christ is betrayed by an apostle for thirty pieces of silver; the priest is betrayed by the half-caste, who pretends to be a good Christian, for seven hundred pesos. Judas kisses Jesus; the half-caste asks the priest's blessing; Judas admits the innocence of Jesus and throws away the blood money; the half-caste confesses that the priest is a saint, and is advised by the priest to "give away the money". The Jewish priests who made use of Judas to capture Jesus despise the traitor; the lieutenant despises the half-caste whose treachery he had used. Jesus tells His apostles that His Father could, if He wished, send Him twelve legions of angels to save Him; the priest is sure that God could save him even in front of a firing squad if He so wished (340). People choose to kill Jesus rather than Barabbas, and the lieutenant is keener to shoot the priest than Calver, the robber and murderer. At the police station the priests is photographed next to the gangster, like Jesus and Barabbas. Pilate recognizes Jesus' innocence but condemns Him to death. The lieutenant recognizes the priest as a good man but is bent on his destruction. Christ is mockingly crowned with thorns; the priest's head in the photograph has a circle, like a halo, in ink. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus withdraws to pray alone; in the cell on the eve of his execution the priest tells the lieutenant: "I'd rather be alone. I've got plenty to do". The lieutenant tries to console the priest in prison as the angel consoles Christ in the garden. Jesus

(340) Ibid. p.167.

refuses to defend Himself with Peter's sword; the priest refuses to resist the police with Calver's gun. Jesus is denied by Peter His apostle; the priest is denied the Sacrament of Penance by Padre José, his fellow priest. The soldiers spit upon Jesus; Padre José spits at the whisky priest. Two policemen hold up the priest when about to be shot; Christ dies between two thieves. Christ pardons his enemies before dying; the priest asks pardon of his enemies. Christ offers comfort to the repentant thief; the priest offers comfort to the dying gangster. Pilate refuses to change the inscription on the cross of Jesus: "What I have written I have written" (John 19:22); the lieutenant walks resolutely from the place of execution as though saying: I have done what I have done" (341).

The Power and the Glory is divided into thirteen chapters, and each chapter could be called a station of the cross, the last one corresponding to the posthumous triumph of the priest accorded by the people who come to recognize the holiness of one who to all appearances seemed so wretched. Each chapter symbolizes a particular event or striking saying in the life of Jesus. So we can assign to each chapter of the novel a Gospel text that expresses its substance:

(341) Ibid. p.286.

PART ONE:

Chapter 1. "I was a stranger and you did not welcome me" (Mt.25: 43).
" 2. "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people.. took counsel together... in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him" (Mat.26:3).
" 3. "There they made a supper; Martha served" (Jn.12:2).
" 4. "Take him yourselves and crucify him" (Jn. 19:6).

PART TWO:

Chapter 1. "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (Jn. 1:11).
" 2. "They came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead" (Jn. 19:33).
" 3. "I am he" (Jn. 18:5).
" 4. "For I was hungry and you gave me no food" (Mt.25:42).

PART THREE:

Chapter 1. "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him" (Lk. 22:43).
" 2. "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk. 23:2).
" 3. "We found this man perverting our nation" (Lk. 23:2).
" 4. "I do not know this man of whom you speak" (Mk.14:71).

PART FOUR:

"Truly this was the Son of God" (Mt. 27:54).

Special mention must be made of chapter two of the second part because of its profound allegorical meaning. The priest is overwhelmed with grief to see his altar wine consumed by the Governor's cousin, the Chief of Police, and the beggar - symbolizing the Establishment and the misery it has created -

and in a flash realizes the Christ would no longer be among His people in the Mass, for, as he explained to the others: "Oh, I don't know" (the reason for my tears) "all the hope of the world draining away" (342). Someone calls him a poet. "A poet is the soul of his country" remarks the beggar (343). And a storm breaks suddenly. The Chief of Police comments: "This is bad news for my men" (344). He was thinking of the obstacles caused by early rains. But the symbolism points to the crucifixion, the fading away of the light of faith, the "draining away" of hope and life in Christ through the coming disappearance of the priest. There is still Padre José left, but he does not care and is unwilling to say Mass or hear confessions or baptize - "he can't be doing any good - or any harm".

The conversation between the Chief of Police, the Governor's cousin, and the beggar goes on interminably, bandying about philosophical and theological terms such as "mystery", "soul", "the source of life", etc. as though they indulged in a mere parlour game of words, because they have "nothing to do, nothing to believe, and nowhere better to go" (345); words that have their significance in the Eucharist, but the priest is silent and slips away and leaves them to their ignorance and unbelief; while outside the storm rages in "the whole state"

(342) Ibid. p.145.
(343) Ibid. p.145.
(344) Ibid. p.145.
(345) Ibid. p.147.

just as, when Jesus died, "there was darkness over the whole land". "Lightning and gods have always been associated; terrible, majestic, deliberate, stabbing impartially, it was like a criticism of human violence (346).

These and many other passages from The Power and the Glory illustrate the symbolism with which the novel is charged. There are little items like Mr. Tench's telling the priest he is lucky because he can get away, having no capital assets to look after in the State - little realizing what "capital" the priest has in the "treasure" of priestly powers he carries and in the people for whose eternal welfare he is responsible. The priest rides a mule, as Christ rode a donkey. The half-caste does not drop off to sleep at the critical hour, and the priest reflects: "Christ would not have found Judas sleeping in the Garden: Judas could watch more than one hour (347). A cock crows, and the priest recalls another act of treachery. Before being taken to prison the Red Shirts poke fun at him, as Jesus was mocked by the soldiers (Mt. 27:29). He foretells his betrayal in the very words used by Christ as recorded by St. Mark (Mk. 14:18).

In conclusion: Graham Greene frequently summarizes the main themes of his Catholic novels in words put into the mouth of a priest, as for example in Brighton Rock, A Burnt-Out Case, and The Comedians. In The Power and the Glory the theme

(346) Graham Greene, The Lawless Roads, ed. cit. p.68.
(347) P.G., p.116.

is summed up in the whisky priest's sermon and in the speech of the lieutenant: on the one side, suffering, the Church, heaven, Christ; on the other, human happiness, the world, hell, Satan. And the hunting down of the priest throughout the story symbolizes the grace of God pursuing man, the theme presented so beautifully by Francis Thompson in his ode: The Hound of Heaven. It also symbolizes the striving of the world to destroy the Church of God as personified in the priest, whose Prototype is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

VII: PADRE JOSÉ

Padre José is the one other priest depicted by Graham Greene in The Power and the Glory. It is difficult to find in any of Greene's writings a more wretched and forlorn figure. His misfortune is greater than Pinkie's because he is a priest with a heavier burden of remorse arising from a deeper awareness of the sinfulness of his situation.

Padre José is a by-word in the whole state of Tabasco. He conformed to Government regulations demanding that priests should marry, and he is living with his wife on a Government pension. He is the only married priest in the state (348). The people call him a "despicable man", "a traitor to God" (349), and he himself is quite open about his tragic position, calling himself "more of a martyr than the rest" (350).

A more sadly realistic picture of a fallen priest is hard to find. The numerous pejorative terms used to describe him are piled up almost to excess. Physically he is presented as "an oldman", "very fat and short of breath" (351); as "fat and ugly and old and humiliated" (352) whose fingers are plump, and who walks so very slowly "because of his bulk". His eyes are "little" and "pink" and "inflamed". His occasional smile is "humble" and "rugged", "baffled", "disintegrated" (353).

(348) In this short phrase Greene pays a handsome tribute to the clergy of Mexico as regards celibacy.
(349) Ibid. p.28.
(350) Ibid. p.28.
(351) Ibid. p.31.
(352) Ibid. p.59.
(353) Ibid. p.33.

He "pants" and "belches" and hiccups nervously, especially "at the thought of facing for the seven hundred and thirty-eighth time his harsh housekeeper - his wife" (354) who feeds him and fattens him and preserves him "like a prize boar". He is "a pig conscious of the slaughter-house". His only job is to sit and eat. He does "not belong any more", he tells the whisky priest. He joins the ranks of those who have nothing to do and nowhere better to go, like the Chief of Police and his associates, but unlike them, still firmly believing in the Church, and like the whisky priest, but with better reason, haunted by the consciousness of mortal sin. Padre José never appears except in shirt and trousers and barefooted. He refuses to exercise his priesthood even in an extreme emergency where the ban on his ministry would automatically be lifted.

With expressions such as "buffoon" and "sacrilege" he gives vent to his sense of failure and remorse. He compares himself to an abandoned ship rolling heavily in space, wrapping the whole globe "with his own sin"; to "an obscene picture hung here every day to corrupt children with" (355). The children who jeer at him symbolize his remorse of conscience, calling him to go to bed with his "bony shadow", and they in return are called by him "little devils", but are referred to by Greene as "a seducing choir of angels" (356). Both Padre José and his

(354) Ibid. p.32.
(355) Ibid. p.32.
(356) Ibid. p.59.

wife complain to the lieutenant of the children's rudeness; "they never leave José alone", but the officer does nothing about it and "nobody can do anything with those children" (357). It is quite impossible to silence remorse of conscience in a priest.

He endures a slow martyrdom. The other priests were put up against a wall and "in two minutes life was extinct", but he had been in torture for two years, which seemed to him like two eternities; with the prospect - God knows - of having to go on bearing his cross for another "twenty-eight years".

Like other priests in Greene's novels and plays, Padre José is a man of faith and humility. Each Mass he used to celebrate was said with the same fear and trembling as his first, according to what he told "in a burst of confidence" to the whisky priest - "Every time... I have such a fear" (358). And as for humility, he had always considered himself the least of the priests. In the parochial clergy conference he would unobtrusively take a back seat and keep out of sight "never opening his mouth". The "busy" cathedral clergy had no time for the likes of Padre José.

Nevertheless Padre José was a coward and between his cowardice and his faith there was a conflict that led to tragedy.

(357) Ibid. p.263.
(358) Ibid. p.120.
(359) Ibid. p.265.

When persecution breaks out he succumbs to craven fear, refusing to carry out his priestly duties to the extent of not even saying a prayer for the innocent Anita in the solitude of the cemetery, not sheltering a hunted fellow priest, and worst of all, declining to go under escort to hear the priest's confession the day before the execution. He occasionally feels the stings of remorse - "the wild attraction of doing one's duty" - and says to his wife: "Perhaps, my dear... it's my duty" (359) but he is no match against her imperiousness and feebly replies to the lieutenant's insistence: "I don't think it's - possible".

Moral cowardice unmans Padre José, but he cannot and will not deny he is a priest, even to his wife:

> "My dear, it's only that... well... I <u>am</u> a priest" (360).

People, however much they despise him for his cowardice, respect him for his priesthood and beg him to say "an official prayer". The whisky priest has no qualms about asking for his absolution and recognizes he still has "the power to turn the wafer into the flesh and blood of God" (361). This is the only place where Greene uses the term "power" when referring to a priest in <u>The Power and the Glory</u>. He does not use it when speaking of the whisky priest. Obviously he is trying to stress how the priestly powers remain unimpaired - ex opere

(359) Ibid. p.265.
(360) Ibid. p.265.
(361) Ibid. p. 32.

operato - even in the most degenerate priests. Two years of living in sin could not erase "something unmistakably clerical in his manner" (362) either. His priesthood had branded him - like a birthmark.

From a theological point of view Padre José adds nothing to the story, but while emphasizing the permanence of the priestly supernatural "Character", it does bring out the fundamental loyalty of the whisky priest. It offsets the good from the evil, like the chiaroscuro in a Rembrandt. Padre José is himself obliged to see the other priest as a challenge:

> "I don't want martyrs here... Go and die quickly. That's your job" (363).

While the whisky priest continues the ministry, Padre José gets married and becomes impotent both sexually (364) and in his general physique (365). He tries to spit in the priest's face, but the spittle falls "impotently" to the ground before it reaches its target.

The portrait of the cowardly priest is sad and bitter and sadly true to life. It is not contemptuous, but it does move us to pity. We are even attracted by the poor priest's lingering faith and self-abasement: "I am unworthy. Can't you see?" (366). In the end we begin to understand his plight:

(362) Ibid. p. 31.
(363) Ibid. p.152.
(364) Ibid. p. 32.
(365) Ibid. p.152.
(366) Ibid. p. 59.

six years of persecution and then, as a last resort, marriage. We feel for him knowing he lacks inner peace of soul. His remorse is much more bitter and deeply rooted than the whisky priest's. He personifies man's hunger and thirst for inward peace, for that peace which only Christ can give. He longs for peace in the silence of the night, but the stars are vocal with remembrance of God. He looks for peace in the stillness of the cemetery, but the priests martyred there reproach him for treason. Anita's innocence speaks to him about damnation. The word in black letters SILENCIO under the classical gateway is a reproach and a mockery to him. It all underlines the fallen priest's remorse of conscience. No wonder; there is nothing more tragic in this world than a priest hurtled from super-natural heights to the abyss of despair. When Padre José looks out of the window at night "in his absurd billowing night-shirt, holding a lamp", one is reminded of the fifth act of the Macbeth tragedy.

But Greene leaves a door to hope ajar. Padre José's humility may yet be his salvation, although he himself thinks that, as a man, he is not even worthy of damnation.

VIII: AN APPRECIATION

Most critics regard The Power and the Glory as Graham Greene's supreme achievement. For Mauriac this novel illustrates

> "that mysterious love which seizes a man in the depths of his ridiculous misery and absurd shame to make him into a saint and a martyr" (367).

In Frederick R. Karl's opinion it is "perhaps" Greene's "finest book" (368). And Greene himself has often said that of all his books this is his favourite. But John Atkins, while admitting that "in its treatment of a religious dilemma the novel is very successful", adds that "in human terms it lacks the interest that belongs to some of Greene's later works" (369).

Greene's style has earned unstinted praise:

> "The language is always graphic, almost always correct, and often exquisite in its neatness....His words are vivacious and iridescent, like pigeons tumbling to eat from his hand (370).

(367) François Mauriac, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1950-1956) Vol. 8, p.430.
(368) Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel (London: Thames and Hudson, 1964) p.99.
(369) John Atkins, Graham Greene (London: Calder & Boyars, 1966), p.124. I do not agree with the following reservations: "The 'radical' policeman is completely routed in his arguments with the 'reactionary' priest, but only for two reasons which have little to do with the real content of the argument. The policeman's position is a parody of what it is supposed to be, and the priest's arguments get their force from the priest's experience". The Pelican Guide to English Literature: The Modern Age. Vol. 7 (Harmondsworth, 1967).- "There is much ineffective sentiment in the priest's recognition of the lieutenant as a good fellow and in the lieutenant's realization that the priest is also interested in the peasants" Frederick R. Karl, op. cit. p.102.
(370) Raymond Mortimer, on the back flap of Collected Essays (London: The Bodley Head, 1969).

The Power and the Glory, with its simplicity, spontaneity, accuracy of phrase, economy of words, and swift dialogue, would be an apt title for its literary expression as well as its transcendental theme.

The characters of the novel we have studied here are: the "whisky priest", a fundamentally saintly man masked by human weaknesses but inwardly stamped with the likeness of the Great High Priest and the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ; the lieutenant who loves his people, radiates idealism and sincerity, earns from the priest the title of "an old friend", but who, out of this same love, thinks it his duty to get rid of the priest for what the latter represents, despite his affection for him as a man. There is also the half-caste who is an odd mixture of cunning and sincerity; the Lehrs, a Lutheran brother and sister, who showed the priest more Christian charity than the Catholic flock; Captain Fellows, breathing good will towards all and sundry; Mr. Tench, whose marriage and dental profession are on the rocks; and Coral, an English planter's daughter who provides the priest with food and shelter. We have the priest's own illegitimate daughter "deprived of the Church's wisdom and God's grace". A number of children occasionally appear, who "act as the unwitting springs of adult action, calling the priest to his duty" (371). There is the self-righteous woman who puts all her trust in her own merits,

(371) David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene (Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), p.53.

reminiscent of Helen in The Living Room: she forestalls Divine Judgement and identifies her prejudices with God's Cause, in contrast with the priest's advice to take the Gospel injunction seriously: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mat. 12:7).

All the characters are true to life. Thanks to Greene's technical skill, which he can deploy at different levels, this is an absorbing novel which reads more like history than a work of fiction (372).

If, as Pryce-Jones rightly remarks in his "Appreciation" of Franz Kafka,

> "A novel is a work of art, not an explanation. The greater the work of art, the more variously it may be seen - all things to all men" (373);

it is my contention that The Power and the Glory is both a work of art and also a great parable - the story can be read in as many ways as the parable can be interpreted.

An objective study of this and other works of Graham Greene is impossible unless one keeps in mind the doctrinal or theological dimension that belongs to their very essence. The Power and the Glory is a parable throwing vivid light upon Christ's Promise:

> "And I tell you, you are Peter /kepha: rock/, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it (Mat. 16:18).

(372) "The Power and the Glory is superior to the others [Brighton Rock and The Lawless Roads] because doctrine is not thrust at us. Instead, it underlies the theme and, if we are impressed by the novel, its spiritual personality will also affect us subtly" (John Atkins, op. cit. p.102).

(373) David Pryce-Jones, Franz Kafka, The Trial (Geneva: Heron Books, 1968), p.268.

One may ask whether this theological dimension has added to or taken from The Power and the Glory and other works of Graham Greene. It has been suggested that without this theology Greene could have been a very successful writer of detective novels. It is my conviction that, precisely because of this theological dimension, Greene's books are of the highest rank and place him among the outstanding writers of our times. He has accomplished a most difficult task: that of conveying theological insights through the medium of literary style and structure. His is a gift that few writers possess. Philip Stratford, discussing the literary relationship between Greene and Mauriac, says the following:

> "Greene believes Mauriac's major accomplishment to lie in his creation of character. Unlike the heroes of Virginia Woolf, of E.M. Forster, Mauriac's characters, writes Greene, 'have the solidity and importance of men with souls to save or lose'. They 'exist with extraordinary physical completeness... but their particular acts are less important than the force, whether God or the devil, that compels them'. His importance to the English reader, Greene maintains, is that he reaffirms the religious sense in the novel and the sense of the supernatural importance of the human act. 'If Pascal had been a novelist', he writes, 'we feel that this is the method and the tone he would have used'. For his part, Mauriac praises Greene's gift for detecting 'the hidden presence of God in an atheistic world', and his skill in tracing the subtle, subterranean movements of Grace operating outside the orbit of the temporal Church. The importance of Greene to the generation of Sartre and Camus, writes Mauriac, is that to the existentialist claim of universal absurdity he opposes the mystery of an Infinite Love. And for the smug and complacent Catholic, as for the over-scrupulous, Mauriac suggests that Greene echoes the message of St. John of the Cross - that on the Last Day it is on our love that we will be judged" (374).

(374) Philip Stratford, op. cit. pp.2-3.

In order to transmit this message of Infinite Love to modern man by way of literary form, Greene delves deeply into the world of to-day. The burden of his communication is that there does exist a Merciful God, and therefore there is room for hope. "Oh, hope! That's a different matter. There's always hope". And the title of one of Karl Barth's works: "God here and now", expresses Greene's basic postulate.

Apart from their literary value, Greene's works are a positive contribution to Christianity. He has succeeded in delivering the Good News of God's saving grace even to people who seldom or never cross the threshold of a Christian church or hear a proclamation of that News by a minister of the Gospel. He does so, as it were, from inside the modern world which is constantly changing, and from the depths of degradation to which the human being has stooped. He does so in new and attractive terms that are meaningful to people to-day.

Greene succeeds in conveying to the general public what otherwise might remain hoarded in the arid tomes of scholastic theology. Like Sacred Scripture, he writes in the symbolic language of poetry and parable. The outstanding modern German theologian, Karl Rahner, says:

> "Christianity, as the religion of the Word proclaimed, of faith which hears, and of a Sacred Scripture, has a special relationship to the word, and hence cannot be without such a special relationship to the poetic word" (375).

(375) Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1966), vol. 4, p.357.

The poetic word goes to the heart, it fascinates and sets free.

> "Are the verses of Thomas Aquinas at their most successful merely the putting into verse of something he says more clearly and more accurately in the articles of the Summa... Or is their poetic word more original and comprehensive, more alive, than that of those theologians who are proud of the fact of not being poets? Is it not time we asked: What has become of the times when great theologians also wrote hymns, when they could write like Ignatius of Antioch, compose poems like Methodius of Olympus, be carried away in hymnody like Adam of St. Victor, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas? Has theology become more perfect because theologians have become prosaic?" (376).

The Power and the Glory is a fine example where Greene has employed symbolism to convey to us a glimpse of ultra-mundane realities through character and action rooted in experience of this world. He does not preach, but he initiates us into the great realities of the Word Incarnate, the Church, and the Sacraments. He presents us with people who open or shut themselves to these realities, and spells out the consequences of their acceptance or refusal in terms of fulfilment or frustration this side of the grave.

The symbolism of Greene's novels has a sort of sacramental quality as "sacred signs of God's grace". Just as Christ is the "image, reflexion, representation, and presence of the Invisible God" (377), so the Sacraments are effective

(376) Karl Rahner, op. cit. vol. 3, pp. 315-316.

(377) "He that sees me, sees the Father" (John 14:9). "It is enough for our purpose to point out very simply that the theology of the Logos is strictly a theology of the symbol, and indeed the supreme form of it" (K.Rahner, op.cit.vol.4, p.235). "Sacramentum est in genere signi metaphysice coalescens ex ritu sensibili et ex significatione gratiae; est autem signum practicum" (J.A.de Aldama, S.J. S.Theol.Summa (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1956), vol. 4, p.22.

Signs of Christ, the Risen Christ, acting in our midst. And this is the theology underlying Greene's portrayal of characters like the "whisky priest" who realizes how important it is for him, the least of men, to defy all difficulties and persecution that would thwart him as "minister of the divine Mysteries". It is the conviction that "grace is everywhere" which inspires Greene to invent character and situation in which grace plays a subtle formative role or its refusal a devastatingly deforming influence.

Parable is the only literary form which Greene the novelist can use to depict the undying struggle between the Church and the "world", between God and Satan, good and evil. It alone could bring out realistically the tragic situation of the priest martyr. Abstract truths about the Church and the priesthood find their natural embodiment in the story of the Mexican persecution. As a parable, it leaves the door open to a number of different interpretations, and it leads from the individual case of Tabasco to the general theme of God's love for men and man's misunderstanding of God's love. No wonder then that "the central character, and the central action, are turned into symbols" (378). The persecution of the Church, represented in the lieutenant's dogged pursuance of the priest, stems from the world's ignorance regarding the true nature of the Church, from the failure of many of the Church's own representatives

(378) F.L. Kunkel, op. cit. p.118.

to realize their true calling, and from the world's failure to realize how our God-given free will can drive a wedge between profession and practice, between the holiness that is taught and fostered in the Church and the unholiness of so many of her members. As Barth says:

> "But is this holiness which you attribute to the Church now perfect? Not yet; that is, so long as it battles in this world. For it always labours under infirmities, nor is it ever wholly purged of the vestiges of vice, until it completely adheres to Christ its Head by whom it is sanctified" (379).

The lieutenant reproaches the Church for its material wealth and its "triumphalism", and to some extent he is right. The Church knows this and "is humble because she is still earthly and subject to human weakness" (380). What the present novel is mainly concerned with is the general state of hostility between the Church and the world, in the Johannine sense.

In the true parable, details will be kept strictly subordinate to the dramatic realism of the story and will not disturb its unity (381). Religious symbols and language will appeal to the imagination and impress themselves upon the memory by their vividness or strangeness, leaving the intellect

"in sufficient doubt about their precise application to tease

(379) K. Barth, The Faith of the Church (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1967), p.114.

(380) Ibid. p. 126.

(381) C.H.Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1969), p.20.

it into active thought" (382).

Between the natural and supernatural orders of being there is more than analogy; there is an inner affinity. Consequently the trials and tribulations of Christ in His Life and Passion and those of the Church in its earthly phase can well be symbolized in the suffering of a man like the "whisky priest" in The Power and the Glory. The realistic portrayal of the priest enables us to grasp something of the Mystery of the Church on earth.

The novel, like the parables of the Gospel and any serious work of art, possesses a significance beyond the original setting; in Mexico we see the embodiment of permanent values and situations. The moral crisis and frustration of a priest who regards his life and ministry as a total failure; his being hounded from pillar to post, etc. are apt symbols for the condition of the Church in this world. In later works we see

(382) W.M.Urban, in Language and Reality, makes a study in depth of religious symbols and metaphysical language. Speaking of insight, he says: "Symbols do not merely represent, through partial coincidence, characters and relations; they are, or at least are supposed to be, a vehicle or medium of insight" (Language and Reality, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961, p.415). "The Christian creeds, for instance, more especially the Nicene, contain linguistic modes which are clearly figurative and 'poetic' (and in interpretation are viewed as 'symbolic')... The creed and the 'dogmatic theology' developed from it never lose therefore the character of poetry. To do so would be to lose the dramatic form of expression and with it the expression of living experience and reality. To lose the vis poetica is at the same time to lose the vis religiosa. It follows therefore that even theology - that part of religion which treats systematically of the Deity, His Nature and Attributes - retains this character" (Ibid. pp.575-576).

Greene grappling with intellectual and pastoral crises in the priest. At the time of publication these problems were commonly thought to be mere fiction and gross exaggeration by most members of the Catholic Church who gloried in the unity and tranquility of the Catholic conscience vis-a-vis the hostile world outside, but in recent years, especially since the Second Vatican Council has ushered in an era of greater self-expression and self-analysis in the Church, these problems are now seen to be very real and very agonizing. Cardinal Suenens of Belgium writes:

> "I think that in a large measure they /priestly defections from the ministry/ are due to a sense of frustration and discouragement... We are struggling in a crisis of hope - a theological virtue. We forget, too often, that we are a pilgrim Church (383).

The Living Room, The Potting Shed, and The Power and the Glory are a trilogy of Greene's works giving expression to this threefold crisis in the priest in the modern world.

(383) Cardinal Suenens, "The Dutch Bishops and Celibacy", The Tablet (May 16, 1970), p.470.

GRAHAM GREENE AND FRANZ KAFKA

Another modern writer, Franz Kafka, also makes good use of the metaphysical parable. "His writing transcends time and place and has become for all of us a symbol of Everyman everywhere, struggling in an alien world" (384).

Between Greene and Kafka there is a marked resemblance. The latter's The Trial, The Castle, and Metamorphosis are metaphysical parables on the themes of the arbitrariness of human justice, the isolation of the human being, and the human reaction to suffering. We may compare, for instance:

> "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning" (385)

with Greene's

> "I can't stand human justice any longer. Its arbitrariness. Its incomprehensibility (386).

Kafka's hero, in The Castle, who goes wandering from place to place without hearth or home recalls the "whisky priest":

> "I am a stranger here, and came to the village only last night" (387).

David Pryce-Jones considers, with regard to Kafka's parables that "a psycho-analytical interpretation can be made,

(384) David Pryce-Jones in Franz Kafka, The Trial (Geneva: Heron Books, 1968), p.XII.
(385) F. Kafka, The Trial (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970) p.7.
(386) Graham Greene, It's a Battlefield (London: Heinemann, 1956), p.230.
(387) F. Kafka, The Castle (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970) p.16.

and so can a theological" (388). The hero of The Trial is a Catholic who recognizes by gesture the significance of the priesthood, and the "stranger" in The Castle looks at "the church tower, firm in line, soaring unfalteringly to its tapering point, topped with red tiles and broad in the roof, an earthly building - what else can men build? - but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling-houses, and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life" (389).

Both Kafka and Greene are defenders of human responsibility and proclaimers of the Gospel injunction: "Judge not, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37), as is shown by Kafka when a priest interprets the parable of the doorkeeper, and by Greene in The Power and the Glory and The Living Room. "Because Kafka wrote in the form of a parable his work becomes prophetic" says Pryce-Jones.

There are also marked differences between Greene and Kafka in their manner of presenting parables. Kafka's use of conscious and subconscious elements, of phantasmagoria and reality, points at once to a parable, whereas in Greene the parable is so veiled by the naturalness of the characters and the simplicity of style and the depth of theological insight, that The Power and the Glory could be dismissed by

(388) David Pryce-Jones, op. cit. p.270.

(389) F. Kafka, op. cit. p.15.

the superficial reader as just a gripping story without transcendence. Whereas Greene is simplicity itself, Kafka gets bogged down in complexities.

My conclusion is that in The Power and the Glory Greene not only describes the struggle of the Church on earth but also its way to victory - charity. The whisky priest goes about, like Christ, doing good. He knows that "the requirement for conduct towards others may then be epitomized in the commandment of love" (390). He makes use of the parable, like Christ, to deliver the Christian message, and in this he follows a literary tradition hallowed by the Bible and by patristic and medieval theology. Paul van Buren speaks of "theology's responsibility to its own past" (391) - and Greene has shared that responsibility in content and in form.

(390) Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1958), p.82.

(391) Paul van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel (London: SCM Press, 1965), p.157.

CONCLUSION

Graham Greene has produced a theological essay on the priesthood: the priest in his personal spiritual life and the priest as an instrument of divine grace in the world. He gives us two types of priest: both consider themselves unworthy, both are tortured by remorse of conscience, both are men of faith; but whereas one atones for his sins, works for "eight hard hopeless years" to save his people, and perseveres in the struggle, despite continual persecution and indifference and being hounded from place to place, until he crowns his efforts with martyrdom; the other priest conforms to an iniquitous Government law, gets married, gives up all ministry, and seems to lose all power of action and decision until he falls into "the grip of the unforgivable sin, despair" (392).

Many priests will find in these two priests certain traits discoverable in their own lives, because they are true to life. The priest here is far from idealized - as the priests in the writings of Bernanos and Mauriac are idealized, artificial creations inspired by pious sentiment, or else very exceptional Saints we seldom meet. Greene depicts priests as men who are, in their personal lives, very near to us, sinners like ourselves, in need of the grace of God to live even decent lives. It is true that the whisky priest, as we have shown,

(392) P.G., p.59.

is interiorly a man of tremendous virtue, but all the outward appearances and his human foibles bear the stamp of a sinful world and make him close to us. And yet there is a transcendent power at work in this very human priest. The divine Mercy wields him as a chosen instrument. Through him and the Church which he personifies God lives continuously mindful of human weakness in the midst of the world, even a world that denies Him. It is impossible to obliterate the image of God from the world, because man is made in God's image and likeness.

Priests who have fallen from grace and either continuing to exercise the ministry or refusing to do so out of cowardice, but regretting their sins like other men, symbolize God's Mercy in the highest degree. It also symbolizes the power of the Sacraments of the Church to communicate God's grace to mankind even in the context of failure, despair, and ruthless opposition from the world. Even sinful and renegade priests are instruments of God's power and mercy.

The whisky priest is more than a leading character on whom the story revolves. He is the embodiment of God's mysterious dealings with His Church. When one priest dies, another takes his place; for individual priests may come and individual priests may go, but God's Church, expressing the High Priesthood of Christ, goes on until the end of time.

My contention is that to ignore or deny this theological and symbolical dimension of <u>The Power and the Glory</u> is to

destroy its very foundations.

I maintain that the whisky priest was a priest who evinced in his life, despite his failings, that fundamental loyalty to his Christian faith and his priestly vocation which will ever enable the Church to battle on through history. He had the compassion of Christ for the world. He shared the likeness of Christ as the Shepherd, the Lamb, the Prophet. He reproduced the essential features of the "suffering Servant of the Lord", and in dying he gave supreme witness. The Power of Christ was in him, and to him belongs the Glory of Christ that will never end.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PRIEST IN GREENE'S PLAYS:

"THE LIVING ROOM"

"THE POTTING SHED"

In two plays, The Living Room, and The Potting Shed, Graham Greene returns to the themes of faith, hope, and charity as exemplified by a priest who plays the leading role. The priest in these two plays is the focal point of our study in the present chapter.

I: THE PRIEST IN "THE LIVING ROOM" (1)

The Living Room, published in 1953, illustrates in modern terms the fulfilment of Christ's promise:

> And be assured, I am with you always,
> to the end of time (Matthew 28:20).

Greene depicts spiritual misery and near-despair arising from a consciousness of grievous sin and psychological frustration but shows us the workings of divine grace still active. It would seem to symbolize the whole Church as both reforming and always in the process of being reformed, as both holy and composed of sinners. It bears out the words of a well-known theologian:

> All holiness during this earthly pilgrimage is precarious. The Church is the communio sanctorum, but, alas, the communio peccatorum too. The Epistles, and the Apocalypse even more, testify that this was so even in her glorious beginnings. She is the Church of poor sinners who can and must pray every day afresh: "Forgive us our trespasses" (2).

For Greene, as for Charles Péguy, the sinner has a place within the very heart of Christianity. Next to the saints, it is

(1) Graham Greene, Three Plays (London: Mercury Books, 1962).
(2) Hans Küng, The Council and Reunion (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), pp. 35-36.

the sinner who probes most deeply the depths of the Christian mysteries, the unfathomable abyss of God's merciful love.

The priest, as the ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) who is the revelation to the world of God's love for man, is represented by Greene as playing a unique part in the conversion of the sinner and the fostering of holiness. The priest's task is more vital than ever in the modern world because of an atmosphere of an obscuring sense of moral values and a loosening hold on Christian Faith that is enveloping modern society. He is a messenger of truth and hope from beyond anything that humanism can offer. This is the underlying theme of <u>The Living Room</u>.

Two elderly sisters, Helen and Teresa, live with their aging and disabled brother, Father James Browne, in their family mansion whose bedrooms have been sealed off one after another when any member of the family died in them. They have a grand-niece, Rose Pemberton, a girl of about twenty, staying with them. The house is like a cemetery. The action of the play takes place almost exclusively in one room - the living room - and the whole setting is one of intimidation, uncharitableness, and lack of Christian understanding.

Rose has just buried her mother, her father having died several years before. After the funeral she is accompanied by a Michael Dennis, the executor of her mother's will, a man with whom Rose had committed adultery on the very night of the funeral. Michael Dennis, an avowed atheist, is a psychologist

who professes to deal only with one thing: human pain. He is intelligent and has a certain sense of responsibility. After Rose has committed suicide he acknowledges that mere psychology is a failure, pleads guilty as an accomplice to the deed, and twice utters the name of God. He symbolizes the modern man who does not trust religion to deal adequately with moral conflict and who needs some sort of "shock" treatment if grace is to make an impact (3).

Rose has the inexperience of her youth and never seems to get down to serious thinking, and yet she cultivates a kind of implicit trust in God, listens attentively to her priest uncle, obeys like a lamb, and condemns her aunts' parade of false religious piety. She tries to gloss over her sexual relations with Michael, a married man, on the score that they are both prompted by love and find happiness with each other.

Father James, though acutely aware of his physical disablement and still more depressed by his seeming uselessness as a priest during the twenty years he has had to spend in a wheelchair as the result of a car smash, is instrumental in shedding light on a situation that would otherwise have been one of unrelieved gloom.

(3) "I wonder whether Christian prayer, prayer in the light of the Incarnation, is not to be <u>defined</u> in terms of penetration through the world to God rather than of withdrawal from the world to God" (John A.T. Robinson, <u>Honest to God</u>; London: SCM Press, 1967, p.97). Greene deals with the grace of God as coming to men through the world and all the ills of the world.

1.

Father James Browne first appears on stage when he is wheeled in during an awkward conversation between his two sisters, Rose, and Michael. His greeting to Rose immediately brings an air of naturalness and affection to a stuffy pseudo-pietistic atmosphere: "It's good to see you, my dear. After all these years. You've changed more than I have" (4). Rose takes to him from the start; his gentleness invites her to confide in him. When she tells him about her relationship with Michael he does not express horror and condemnation but gives the girl time to reflect more deeply on what real love gives and takes, leaving it to God's grace to enlighten her. It is only when Rose explicitly asks for guidance that he makes a firm statement of principle and the practical conclusion that she must leave Michael. But when she protests that she would not be able to stand the pain of separation, he replies: "Then you'd better go with him, if you're as weak as that" (5). A reply verging on sarcasm, but said so gently that the bonds of affection between uncle and niece are not strained. He is a man with a great sense of justice and defends both Rose and her lover from unwarranted personal attacks by Helen and Teresa. Helen, with all her failings, he shields from Rose's aspersions

(4) The Living Room, ed. cit. p.15.

(5) Ibid. p.61.

although he realizes that both his sisters are victims of narrowness of outlook. He is profoundly convinced that genuine love alone can save, and it is this love that inspires all his dealings towards others in a painful situation.

He is affectionate without being unduly sentimental. Little phrases like "My dear... Even if you don't like tea, come in and sit down... Call me if you need me... Rose, please, just wait" etc. reveal his gift for sympathy. He loathes uncharitable gossip. He patiently explains to Rose the sealing off of the rooms in the house but remarks on its absurdity and castigates the unchristian obsession with the fear of death. Towards the end of the play he shares with his sisters the blame for Rose's death:

> "We've ruined her between us... Don't blame him. Blame our dead goodness. Holy books, holy pictures, a subscription to the Altar Society. Do you think, if she had come into a house where there was love, she wouldn't have hesitated, thought twice, talked to us....?" (6)

In contrast to his sisters, Father James shows great respect for other people who are trying to get beyond outward observances and are groping for the spirit behind the letter of the law - even Church law. His openness towards Rose prompts her to re-think her moral situation and to make some effort to withdraw from a choice which can only spell disaster. He is disabled bodily, but his discernment, tact, and common sense portray the grace of God breaking through a religious mentality governed by

(6) Ibid. p.50.

fear - a mentality aptly symbolized in the dreary house in which he lives and the attitude of the sisters with whom he lives. His speech is measured and precise, but so homely that any layman could use it without feeling it was stilted - a symbol of the grace of Holy Orders operating through natural words and gestures. The confidence shown by Michael and Rose towards the priest portrays the need of the modern world to unburden itself of its problems and guilty conscience, however disguised, to a sympathetic listener who is recognized as having some kind of vocation to promote better human relationships within a deeper understanding of the ultimate purpose of life. The young people's readiness to give the priest a hearing marks the workings of divine grace. Father James's delicate handling of these confidences conveys an idea of divine mercy. Helen and Teresa are "loud" in their protestations of faith and morality, but the real spirit of the Gospel comes across in the priest's gentle firmness.

He is determined to ward off all prying into motives by his sisters when they act the role of inquisitors into the love affair between Michael and Rose, and he does so out of his priestly instinct:

"You've asked your questions, Helen. Now leave us alone"

and when Helen retorts that he is "preaching" to her, he answers:

"I'm sorry. Sometimes I remember I'm a priest" (7).

(7) Ibid. p.26.

While disclaiming any mystical experience, he relishes the mystical works of St. John of the Cross and his reading of them out loud for his sister Teresa together with his comments on the "dark night" of the soul captivate her. And at the same time he finds consolation and enlightenment in the simple prayers known to every Catholic from childhood: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Act of Contrition, etc.

Summing up Father Browne's character as a man, we may note he is sincere (8), outspoken when the occasion demands it (9), calm (10), self-controlled (11), sensible (12), realistic (13), frugal (14), self-denying (15), grateful (16), happy (17), and full of good humour. (18).

Intellectually he is alert. In conversation with Michael, the professional psychologist, he quickly disposes of sophistry and any tendency to ignore distasteful facts.

2.

Priesthood and manhood, in ideal circumstances, are like grace and nature; the former does not destroy but perfects the latter, and they react on a basis of mutual interdependence. Every man should be ready to serve, even though his service entails command, but the priest is specially called and

(8) Ibid. pp. 24, 49.
(9) Ibid. pp. 26, 27, 28, 31, 32.
(10) Ibid. pp. 24, 26.
(11) Ibid. p. 26.
(12) Ibid. p. 25.
(13) Ibid. p.28.
(14) Ibid. p.15.
(15) Ibid. p.21.
(16) Ibid. p.44.
(17) Ibid. p.44.
(18) Ibid. p.24.

anointed to serve others in the things pertaining to the worship of God, to peace and good will among men, and to an overall development of man's God-given faculties in response to God's call.

Father James Browne is depicted by Graham Greene as a gentleman (in Newman's definition, as one who never gives deliberate offence to another person) enhanced by the charity of Christ, but he also allows the priestly calling to show through, however unobtrusively. He is a man who is acutely conscious of his practical uselessness but is never in doubt concerning his identity as a priest of God:

> "I had a real vocation for the priesthood - perhaps you'd explain it in terms of a father-complex. Never mind now. I'm not laughing at you. To me it was a real vocation" (19)

are his words to Michael; and to Helen who tries to interfere with his understanding approach towards Rose in her predicament, he says with unaccustomed abruptness:

> "I know I'm your brother, but I'm still a priest. I've asked you to go" (20).

He knows that "a priest isn't intended to be just a comfort to his family"; the whole world is his parish, but how little he can do:

> "I'm a priest who can't say Mass or hear confessions or visit the sick. I shouldn't have been afraid of dying. I should have been afraid of being useless" (21).

(19) Ibid. p.67.
(20) Ibid. p.50.
(21) Ibid. p.20.

This is his greatest torment; it makes him restless; it conjures up dreams of febrile activity. When he is half asleep he imagines that his legs are still there and itching to run in search of the lost sheep. He tells Teresa:

> "Do you know one of my day-dreams? I get them again now - perhaps they belong to second childhood. I dream of helping somebody in great trouble. Saying the right word at the right time"(22)

Consciously or unconsciously Greene here portrays the radical yearnings of the genuine priest as a sharer, through the sacramental grace of Holy Orders, in the redemptive urge of Christ who said: "I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already! " (Luke 12:49). Thus he says to Michael and Rose:

> "I want to help you. I want to be of use. I would want it if it were the last thing in life I could have" (23).

Father James, with all his affectionate regard for the two young people, cannot give approval to their so-called solution to their problem. No amount of rationalization or psychological probings can absolve man from the divine insistence that marriage is exclusively a one man and one woman relationship of love incarnate in sexual union. Adultery is out, no matter what short-term benefits may accrue from it. This the atheist Michael does not understand because he knows only one enemy:

(22) Ibid. p.43.
(23) Ibid. p.62.

pain; and yet, being possessed of a certain moral integrity, he repudiates the idea of a transitory and back-stage "love-affair"; nevertheless he underrates woman's need for exclusiveness in love (24). The priest is a better reader of human nature, so that when Michael says he is going to leave his wife without bitterness on her part, he replies:

> "I was wrong. You've got a great imagination, if you think you can leave a woman without bitterness" (25).

He also better understands how even a straying Catholic woman has developed certain potentialities that a mock-marriage cannot fulfil:

> "You can't fob off a Catholic with a registrar's signature and call it a marriage..."

even though physical satisfaction may be catered for:

> "I don't say she wouldn't be happy - in a way - as long as the desire lasted" (26).

Father James agrees with Michael that it would be a great strain on Rose to have to spend her days in the company of three elderly people like himself and his two sisters:

> "You have plenty of reason on your side, but..." (27).

The <u>but</u> is a matter of high principle and far-reaching consequences which the priest cannot ignore:

(24) Ibid. p.28.
(25) Ibid. p.29.
(26) Ibid. pp. 30, 31.
(27) Ibid. p.31.

> "You're a psychologist. You know how often young girls fall in love with a man your age, looking for a father... Rose never knew her father" (28).

Here the priest is speaking a language Michael understands, and the latter reacts violently, prompted not by reason or insight but by emotional frustration. The priest has the deeper perception of values and distinguishes between love oriented towards maturity and the haphazard gropings of adolescence. On the other hand, he does not consider adultery the greatest of crimes, but it is a very serious breach of love and justice:

> "There's only one answer I can give. You're doing wrong to your wife, to Rose, to yourself - and to the God you don't believe in" (29).

Michael's problem is similar to Scobie's (30), but whereas Scobie, as a Catholic, knows he is doing wrong, Michael merely wants to get the priest to put his cards on the table so that he can, as he thinks, outplay him. Both Scobie and Michael hear from a priest the same warning: "Leave her. Don't see her. No letters between you".

Greene is trying to point to the presence and grace of God acting through remorse of conscience. Rose falls to her knees and cries out "Tell me what to do, Father" (31). But in serious emotional stress the abstract principles of Faith and morality often fail to register, so while Rose pays lip-service to the

(28) Ibid. p.32.
(29) Ibid. p.29.
(30) Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (London: Heinemann, 1960) pp. 266-267.
(31) Three Plays, ed. cit. p.61.

maxims, her heart is elsewhere:

> "Since my last confession three weeks ago I've committed adultery twenty-seven times... and, Father, it doesn't mean a thing. We are supposed to be talking to God, aren't we, through you" (32).

And there comes what appears to be just the stock answer and platitude of the moral text-book:

> "The trouble is you don't trust God enough. He would make things so much easier for you if you would shut your eyes and leave it to Him" (33),

but in reality these words express, however vaguely, the ultimate surrender in faith which is at the heart of the dialogue between God and each individual in moments of vital decision. Even though Father James's "tongue is heavy with the penny catechism", and Rose protests: "Don't give me a Catholic answer", he brings her to face the fact that by indulging her own desires she is causing considerable harm to another. The priest must also have pity on Michael's wife and respect her rights, but these are complementary to, not in contradiction with, Rose's real interests:

> "You've got a lifetime to fool yourself in... It's a long time to keep forgetting that poor hysterical woman who has a right to need him" (34).

When Rose admits that she is pursuing a wrong course and has not the courage to deny herself what in conscience she

(32) Ibid. p.51.
(33) Ibid. p.52.
(34) Ibid. p.62.

cannot approve, the priest is unmoved by a presumptuous appeal to God's Mercy:

> "There are a lot of us like that, Father. When I betray Him, I'm not doing any worse than Peter, am I? God died for the cowards too" (35)

and merely points to conversion:

> "He made them into heroes, even Peter".

Presumption is as much a denial of hope as despair, and the one engenders the other. God is all-merciful, but God is not mocked.

3.

In this play Greene emphasizes a basic Christian and human truth: the impossibility of trying to ignore God, and the absurdity of seclusion within the living-room of our own personal selves. Pleasure and pain, life and death, must be enjoyed and endured with reference to the Creator (36). Father Browne is the mouthpiece of this Christian conviction, speaking "ex cathedra", as it were from an invalid's wheel-chair in a stuffy old house, both of which are not of his making. He accuses himself of spiritual sloth, but his eagerness to communicate the Gospel to others after imbibing it more deeply himself is a sign not of sloth but of spiritual progress. His

(35) Ibid. p.53.
(36) "Man is from God and for God; purely and simply an object derived from God and a subject oriented toward God; His creature, yet His creature who is free for God". Karl Barth, God Here and Now (London: Routledge, 1964), p.5.

"prayer of quiet" - to use the mystical term - and the growing simplicity of his spiritual outlook enable him with greater authority to reproach Helen for her encroachments upon Rose's personal decision-making, to encourage Rose to have greater trust in God, to speak with Michael of life's being a total failure if God is deliberately ousted. "Judge not, and you will not be judged" (Luke 6:37) underlies all the priest's intervention. His mutilated body would seem to argue against the Goodness of God and therefore against the existence of God. Rose attributes to injustice the demand that she should be deprived of her Michael, on a par with the accident that deprived her uncle of his limbs:

> "Don't talk to me about God or the saints. I don't believe in your God who took away your legs and wants to take away Michael... I don't believe. I don't believe" (37).

Father James holds out a hand to her, but she draws away from it and exclaims:

> "I wish to God that I didn't feel so lonely".

After Rose's suicide the priest remains firm in his belief and hope. Michael asks him bluntly:

> "Can you believe in a God who lets that happen?"

The answer has no frills:

> "Yes".

The atheistic comment:

> "It's a senseless creed",

(37) Th.P., ed. cit. p.63.

but faith - "that alone can guarantee the blessings we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen" (Hebrews 11:1 - Jerusalem Bible) - answers:

> "It seems sometimes" (38).

Father James was a man of faith not intellectual curiosity:

> "There's one thing I remember from the seminary. I've forgotten nearly all the things they taught me, even the arguments for the existence of God. It comes from some book of devotion: 'The more our senses are revolted, uncertain, and in despair, the more surely Faith says: This is God: all goes well' " (39).

He had frustrations in life but did not despair - spiritual suicide. Hope and trust in God is the burden of his own thoughts and of his conversation with those around him. "Mercy is what I believe in" (40). And the conviction of God's love for his creatures extends to all with all their faults and failings. So he implores the unbeliever to refrain from hatred of God:

> "If He exists, He loved her too, and saw her take that senseless drink. And you don't know and I don't know the amount of love and pity He's spending on her now" (41).

Reading the final pages of <u>The Living Room</u> I am reminded of these words of Bonhoeffer:

> I am sure of God's guiding hand, and I hope I shall never lose that certainty. You must never doubt that I am travelling my appointed road with gratitude and cheerfulness. My past life is replete with God's Goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving

(38) Ibid. p.68.
(39) Ibid. p.68.
(40)
(41) Ibid. p.68.

> love of Christ crucified. I am thankful for all those who have crossed my path, and all I wish is never to cause them sorrow, and that they like me will always be thankful for the forgiveness and mercy of God and sure of it (42).

Hell would seem to be a denial of Mercy. Father James does not deny the existence of Hell - which Christ Himself affirmed in no uncertain terms - but he does react against its glib defenders. He tells Teresa:

> "Hell is for the great, the very great. I don't know anyone who's great enough for Hell except Satan" (43).

The thought of Hell is meant as a warning not a disturbance of inward peace when that peace is sought in obedience to God's love. The priest is protesting against his sisters' rash-judging of the fate of Rose and at the same time is rising above his own inward aridity of soul, and above a certain formalism in piety that makes its victims an easy prey to the fear of death and breeds stagnation. The priest is Graham Greene's voice.

4.

Some of the phrases used by Father Browne in this play have been criticised as unorthodox from a Catholic point of view. For example, he says to Rose about his two sisters:

> "They are good people. I doubt if they've committed a big sin in their lives - perhaps it would have been better if they had" (44).

(42) D. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (London: Collins, 1966) p.131.
(43) Th.P., ed. cit. p.44.
(44) Ibid. p.20.

He remembers his experiences in a parish where "it was often the sinners who had the biggest trust in mercy" because they felt the need of it more deeply. He remembers Saints like Mary Magdalen "to whom much was forgiven" and who consequently responded with greater love. He knows that souls with great potentialities for evil can also become capable of great good. He knows that the "stuffiness" and mediocrity of so many so-called practising Catholics muffle the voice of witness that the Church is called upon to give to the world. His words merely reflect those of Revelation:

> I know all about you: how you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other, but since you are neither, but only lukewarm, I will spit you out of my mouth (Rev. 3:15, 16).

Father James Browne's outlook is optimistic but not without a foundation in human psychology as well as theology. In man's choices there are more limiting factors than we are conscious of. Rose's impulsive nature, her immaturity, her zest for radical measures before taking thought, her inadequate religious upbringing as the daughter of a mixed marriage and orphaned of father at an early age, the dull oppressiveness of her aunts company and spirit - they are all extenuating circumstances.

So her uncle was quite right in asserting:

> "Nobody claims we can know what she thought at the end" (45)

even though he did not see her turn to God in prayer at the last.

(45) Ibid. p.63.

Michael is sharply rebuked when he misrepresents what the Church teaches concerning the individual fate of those who take their own lives. The Church does not condemn outright the person, only the external action in se - "We aren't as stupid as you think us" (46). What he does condemn is the whole atmosphere of the house where Rose met her death (47).

The problem of evil in the world is an insoluble enigma to the unbeliever, but to the priest it is a challenge that must be faced in a practical manner rather than a theoretical conundrum. To Michael's question whether he believed in a God who made the world riddled with pain he answers:

> "Yes. And I believe He shared its pain. But He didn't only make the world - He made eternity. Suffering is a problem to us, but it doesn't seem a big problem to the woman when she has borne her child. Death is our child, we have to go through pain to bear our death. I'm crying out with the pain like you. But Rose - she's free, she's borne her child" (48).

Pain has a purpose, affirms Father Browne, but it is only provisional and to a large extent it is man-made, being permitted by God so that love may grow in us. Great suffering is a gift in disguise that makes for greatness. "One has to deserve to be a failure" (49). Even God has, so to speak, "His happy failures".

(46) Ibid. p.69.
(47) Compare with the whisky priest's: "That was another mystery: it sometimes seemed to him that venial sin - impatience, an unimportant lie, pride, a neglected opportunity - cut you off from grace more completely than the worst sins of all" (The Power and the Glory, ed. cit. p.180).
(48) Th.P., p.69.
(49) Ibid. p.53.

But love and suffering together have redeeming power, and Father Browne is a minister of redemption through his example of charity in ordinary everyday things. He is not entirely "useless" as a priest. He is unable to say Mass, but he offers daily the sacrifice of his infirmities. He cannot preach, but his wheel-chair is the pulpit from which he proclaims the Gospel message. He does not run after the flock, but he sees good in Michael, excuses Helen, behaves with exquisite courtesy towards the charwoman, and does his best to ward off tragedy from Rose. His household was certainly "pure" in the sexual meaning of the word, but it was not steeped in love, and he tells Helen quite openly: "if Rose had come into a house where there was love" she would have been rescued from her plight. Like the whisky priest, he insists on the primacy of love as the soul of all virtues.

In scene I of Act II there is a heated exchange between the priest and his sister Helen in which Helen says all the "right" things according to the moral theology text-book: adultery is a mortal sin, sin must be prevented as far as possible, casual affairs are less dangerous than a permanent liaison sanctioned by the civil law, confession will bring a remedy, etc. And each time her statements are queried by the priest. His approach is no less orthodox, but it is far more prudent and imaginative: he lets Rose feel she is not condemned out of hand without a hearing, and he gently urges her to take

stock of her own conscience. What he sharply reproves Helen for is her spying tactics on Rose and Michael, and her resorting to lies to her sister Teresa in order to keep Rose inside the house. This shady and shabby treatment of another person is not the way by which the grace of God reaches a troubled soul, and Father James represents the true wisdom of the Church in deploring it. Orthodoxy is not enough, it must be translated into "orthopraxis".

A man's conscience is always an inscrutable mystery. External appearances are the only evidence we have for passing judgement on another person, and they are not sufficient to pronounce sentence. The priest, like the psychologist, has the task of trying to understand people with a view to helping them; the former is primarily God's minister for the deletion of "malum culpae", the latter's sole aim is to delete or alleviate "malum poenae"; sin and suffering go hand in hand, but the psychologist tries to ignore the sin and even persuade his patient that there is no such thing, whereas the priest offers Christ's forgiveness of sin and also Christ's consolation in suffering. Rose's suicide convinces even Michael of the limitations of his craft:

> "For God's sake, don't talk psychology at me today. Psychology wasn't any use to her. Books, lectures, analysis of dreams. Oh, I knew a hell of a lot, didn't I, about the human mind..." (50).

(50) Ibid. p.66.

Father James too has his limitations like all priests. The priesthood itself and the whole Sacramental life of the Church is powerless in the face of obstinate refusal on the part of those approached, but "what is impossible to men is not impossible to God" (Mat. 19:26). The priest seems to have failed with Rose, but the grace of God was not entirely ineffective, and Rose acted on the spur of the moment, without full deliberation, in a state of bewilderment, not in defiance of her conscience.

Greene stresses the need of reverence for a person's conscience and the inadequacy both of atheistic psychology and of mere abstract moral principle in dealing with an individual situation where life and death are at stake. Judgement belongs to God alone; we can only hope with a hope that expresses itself not in facile optimism but in that basic act of religion: prayer.

5.

Whereas in <u>The Power and the Glory</u> Greene deals with the moral crisis of a priest who thinks he is rejected by God because of his serious sins, in <u>The Living Room</u> we are confronted with a priest whose physical disabilities render him incapable of the active priestly ministry and whose interior life has none of the raptures or formidable trials of the contemplative. And it is my opinion that Father Browne symbolizes the Church

in the modern world: a Church handicapped by its inability to meet the deChristianized world whenever it "pontificates" from the Chair of authority in traditional ecclesiastical language and usages, but a Church with real eagerness to be of service to the world and, within the limitations of these handicaps and of the play of human free will, one that commands a hearing. This point will be developed further when I speak of Graham Greene and the Second Vatican Council's new orientations.

Personally, Father Browne in the wheel-chair, pushed by his sisters, in a house that is more like a morgue than a home although cluttered up with semblances of piety, represents a triumph of humble acceptance as against the rebellious attitudes of Rose and Michael, and the triumph of hope and cheerfulness over the servile fear of death. His apostolic yearnings break through his physical limitations and, in dreams or semi-consciousness, grow legs again to run after the lost sheep. This is an apt symbol of the pastoral crisis in which many priests today find themselves: they know the Mission of the Church, they believe profoundly in its divine institution and abiding Spirit, but they have not yet discovered ways and means of making contact with a rapidly-changing and apostatizing world. The words of Moltmann: "In the Christian life faith has the priority, but hope the primacy" (51) are exemplified in this invalid priest whose closing words in the play combine a tender

(51) Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (London: SCM Press 1967).

affection for his sisters together with a severe remonstrance against their lack of hope:

> "Stop it, Helen... God isn't unmerciful like a woman can be. You've been afraid too long. It's time for you to rest, my darling. It's time for you to rest" (52).

He also represents the genuine priest's interior life: his serenity, his tact, his gift of counsel beyond the scope of ordinary moral prudence, his own "dark night" of the soul albeit free from tumult, the simplicity of his prayer with all its wandering of the imagination (53): they are all workings of divine grace which turns failure into effectiveness and suffering into the means of redemption for self and others. His physical disablement shows the possibility of spiritual growth in adversity - a partial answer to the atheistic psychologist's taunt and to the whole problem of pain. It bears out one of the main themes of Greene's theologically-focused writings: that God is to be found in the midst of human weakness. The priest interprets Rose's suicide in the light of his own consciousness of failure and the failure of the household. He is sure of his belief but unsure of himself. He is close to that God who "withers a man up" only to fill him with a new-found source of energy; like St. Paul who said that when he was weak then he could count on the strength of Christ working

(52) Th.P., ed. cit. p.70.

(53) Cfr. Sta. Teresa de Jesús, Obras Escogidas (Paris: Baudry, Libreria Europea; no date), p.77, n.8.

within him.

That Father Browne failed to prevent Rose's suicide does not, as Greene sees it, render the priestly intervention null and void. In the priesthood there is no "magic power", nor does grace work automatically. Grace is an invitation to love and the priest's task is to make that invitation heard not to enforce acceptance. But, after the event - which God alone can scrutinize - the priest must ward off prying eyes and reproachful tongues and leave the judgement to God with a prayer for mercy. Father Browne becomes more explicit and resolute after Rose's death than before, but that is because the survivors need his guidance now, not the deceased. The real failure is adultery and the injustices it creates; the real challenge is self-restraint versus self-indulgence; but either way there is suffering:

> "In a case like yours we have to choose between suffering our own pain or suffering other people's. We can't <u>not</u> suffer" (54).

Rose refuses to listen to a "Catholic" reason for quitting her lover, because "Catholic" in her mind has become divorced from practical common sense and seems to thrive on fear and lovelessness, so the failure is partly the outcome of a shallow Christian upbringing or lack of response on her part to the authentic voice of grace, or both. We just cannot judge where

(54) <u>The Living Room</u>, ed. cit. p.61.

the blame lies, we can only try to follow the promptings of the Spirit and correct false attitudes and wrong emphases when dealing with people especially the young. Father Browne would have failed only if he had simply thrown up his hands in horror when he first discovered Rose's lapses and joined in the condemnation pronounced by his sisters against Rose and Michael. That his advice to her to pray failed to touch her because, as he thought, if he had been a real man of prayer he would be invested with some kind of healing power, is merely an acknowledgement of his own limitations. There have been and still are remarkable instances of faith healing in the Church - and outside the visible fold - and the Gospel promises still hold good - as we priests know who have administered the Sacrament of the sick - but when a person refuses to <u>pray</u>, it is presumptuous to expect miracles; and even with prayer and the Sacraments, miracles are <u>gratis data</u> not their ordinary effect (55). Father James merely acknowledges his own limitations and the collective responsibility of the household - symbolizing that of the whole Household of the Church in the world - but does not yield to despair even in extreme situations, on the

(55) I disagree with Fr. J.P.Murphy when he writes: "Father Browne's failure to help his grand-niece is even more bewildering in the context of his comments after her suicide... Why should a good, intelligent, compassionate priest fail in the golden opportunity of his priestly career?" (<u>Renascence</u>, vol. XII, 1959, pp. 44-45).

contrary, he surrenders to hope. And when Michael, with a sneer, pretends to teach the Church what she teaches:

> "Oh yes, your Church teaches she's alive all right. She teaches she's damned - damned with my wife's pills" (56),

he reacts firmly by rejecting the caricature and treating it as the emotional language of the psychologist off his guard. To say that "Greene hears the repentance of his characters and dispenses absolution" (57) is true in the sense that Greene's priest characters voice the mercy of God acting through His Church.

6. Conclusion

Graham Greene calls himself "a late-comer to the theatre" (58) and tells us why he wrote this play:

> I needed a rest from novels...
> one must try every drink once (59).

But he does not take a rest here from theological themes. He closely dramatizes the genuine Catholic attitude towards sin and divine mercy. Philip Stratford writes:

> The Living Room's bitter lover, unappealing wife, long-suffering young mistress, and ineffectual priest are stock types whose roles have been newly apportioned and whose situation has been transposed to the stage. The outcome of the play is also typical: another provocative suicide, the salvation of the Catholic heroine hanging in the balance between justice and mercy (60).

(56) Th.P., ed. cit.p.69.
(57) Philip Stratford, Faith and Fiction (Notre Dame: University Press 1967) p.264.
(58) Graham Greene, Preface to Th.P., p.vii.
(59) Ibid. pp. ix-x.
(60) Philip Stratford, op. cit. p.252.

Certainly there are parallels and, so to speak, Greenian loci communes: Father Browne's advice to Rose and Father Crompton's to Sarah Miles; and Father Rank's to Scobie; Father Browne's discussion on pain with Michael and the whisky priest's with the lieutenant; etc. but that is simply because in essentials the Church is unwavering in her proclamation and the essentials are few in number. Even the basic situations of human decision are very similar within a great variety of décor of time and space and character. Greene only repeats himself where repetition is necessary forcommunication with a generation that leaps from branch to branch but does not get to the roots of the present-day malaise.

Among the difficulties facing a novelist who turns to writing for the stage is the time factor which seems to impose artificial limits on the writer's creative freedom. Within the short space of about two hours there is little or no time for commentary, so that "the spoken word must carry the full weight of his characters' thoughts and feelings". It is not surprising that although "Greene's plays fairly crackle with dramatic tension engendered by vitally charged characters" (61) the parry and thrust between Catholic theology and modern atheism is a weight almost too heavy for a two-hour play to bear before a modern untheologically-minded audience. The great autos sacramentales of Calderón, Lope de Vega, etc. of the "golden

(61) F.L. Kunkel, op. cit. p.169.

age" in Spain were much longer and the audience was theologically more sophisticated than our own. Even the English Mystery plays had a better chance of being understood than a modern play with a theological content.

On the other hand The Living Room has several dramatic qualities that make for success. All the characters are taken from real life, and each has an important place in the action and the atmosphere of the play. There is nothing and no one superfluous. Even Dennis's wife contributes to Rose's fearsome remorse of conscience that prompts her to suicide. The "good faith" of Teresa, and especially of Helen, is manifestly not good enough, as their brother maintains; but the priest is not a failure nor is he a symptom of "the failure of Greene's Church" (62), except in so far as grace does not over-ride human freedom and human freedom is limited. And yet, there is a sense in which Greene reflects here on relative failure in the Church; it is perhaps his insight into the dictum later to be stressed by the Vatican Council: "Ecclesia semper reformanda".

What has upset many of the play's critics is that it is not a fairy tale that explicitly ends "and they were happy ever after" but leaves us facing a mystery. How easy it would have been for Greene to strike a note of rebellion followed by facile optimism, regaling us with Rose's break from all Christian principle and eloping with Michael! How easy it would

(62) John Atkins, Graham Greene (London: Calder and Boyars, 1969) p. 220.

have been for Father Browne to wash his hands of the whole affair and remain the non-committed onlooker! But Greene's idea of the Church's witness is something more than passive observation. The Church herself has an inward conscience that often belies her outward structures, and she is not in the world merely to relieve tensions when moral principles are at stake. To accuse Father James of "spiritual pride", "sarcasm", and "lies", and to say that the Catholic Church has robbed Graham Greene of his artistic integrity (63) is a grave error of judgement.

.....

Greene in this play shows real understanding of the Catholic priesthood. Not an easy matter. Literature is full of abnormal or delinquent priests or else of adulatory abstractions. There are situations here verging on the grotesque, such as Rose's becoming a married man's mistress on the very night of her mother's funeral, but on the whole, idealism is wedded to realism, especially in Greene's portrayal of Father Browne. There is a sort of completeness about Greene's theological approach to this priest who has a real vocation but has, because of his accident, few opportunities of exercising it externally. The "golden" opportunity that comes his way he does not neglect. He may seem to have failed, but failure or success are almost impossible to assess in a priest unless we look at the man himself, and Father James Browne, personally, is a model of redemptive suffering. A hard saying for unbelievers.

(63) John Atkins, op. cit.pp. 217-221.

II: THE PRIEST IN "THE POTTING SHED"

The Potting Shed (1) was first produced in London on February 5, 1958 at the Globe Theatre, but had already appeared, with modifications, the previous year in New York. The third of the three acts as it was first written was staged in London and is the only authorized version for Great Britain, but differs from the American version (2).

It is predominantly an intellectual play whose central theme is belief and disbelief in miracles, and in particular the miracle of resurrection from the dead (3). It is tempting to dismiss the whole play as fantastic and belonging to a dream-world, but in fact it is a modern commentary on those words of Christ at the end of his parable about the rich man and Lazarus:

> Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16: 31)

and on the attitude of the intellectual leaders of Israel after

(1) Th.P., ed. cit.

(2) Ibid. Author's note, p.76, and the preface, p.xii.

(3) "Resurrection" in the strict theological sense is the rising to eternal Life (or Death), not the return to earthly life. "Resuscitation" is only a return from apparent death. The cases recorded in the New Testament: v.gr. Jairus's daughter, the son of the Naim widow, Lazarus (John 11), Dorcas (Acts 9), Eutychus (Acts 20) etc. are returns to this life from real death. Greene visualizes a modern example of this kind.

the resurrection of Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, and after Christ's own Resurrection. It is also an illustration of those words of Tennyson's

> More things are wrought by prayer
> Than this world dreams of (Morte D'Arthur).

Whereas in other writings Graham Greene has defended the supernatural action of divine grace in the modern world, here he also speaks of the preternatural effect of prayer (4). The play revolves round a priest, Father William Callifer and the restoration to life of his nephew James Callifer with its effects on the unbelief of the family circle and on the faith of the priest himself who is a convert from unbelief.

The Callifers are a family of staunch materialists. H.C. Callifer wrote a book entitled The Cosmic Fallacy about thirty years before his death which earned him fame among the agnostic circles of the day, but about the same time a brother of his, William, became a Roman Catholic and afterwards a priest. William was ostracized from the family and his name was never mentioned in the Callifer household from the day that something very extraordinary happened in the potting shed in the garden of "Wild Grove, the Callifer home. What this extraordinary event was is gradually disclosed throughout the play. For thirty years it remained a closely-guarded secret, but shortly after the death of H.C. Callifer it came to the knowledge of the person most directly involved: James Callifer,

(4) The miraculous is often, but wrongly, called "supernatural".

the deceased man's son, who had tried to commit suicide and had actually died, but was brought back to life through the prayer and heroic self-offering of his uncle Father William Callifer. James had lost all memory of what had happened that day, but after submitting to psychiatric treatment regained some of his childhood recollections and eventually sought out his uncle to learn the truth - and the family's bitter opposition to anything and anyone who vouched for the truth.

The priest appears personally only in scene two of act II of the play, and there he is anything but an inspiring figure. He appears as a man devoid of faith, a mere clock-work with the mainspring broken but with outward observances pointing to five minutes before doom. A wreck of a priest, it would seem, defended from the public gaze by an insolent old hag of a housekeeper. A man in the depths of despair... Why? And Greene traces back from appearances to reality, from apparent failure to a heroic stand that brought life from the grave for another but for the priest brought dire affliction of the spirit. He thus sets the stage for a poignant confrontation of Christian belief versus agnostic or materialistic unbelief in its militant form.

On the side of unbelief are ranged Mrs. Callifer, the wife of H.C.; John, her son; Sara, the ex-wife of James; Dr. Baston, a devoted disciple of H.C.; on the side of belief

there are, besides Father William, Mrs. Potter, wife of the one-time gardener at Wild Grove who witnessed the occurrence in the potting shed and testified to his wife who is now widowed; and in between are: Anne, the precocious child of thirteen whose motto "everything is possible" seems to keep the play afloat; Dr. Kreuzer, an honest non-believer who sometimes doubts his disbelief; and Mrs. Conolly, Father William's housekeeper who knows nothing of what happened in the potting shed but behaves as though she alone could save Father William from ruin. James Callifer is a successful journalist but is haunted by something mysterious which he tries to unravel.

1.

In scene two of act I, James asks Dr. Baston: "Who's William Callifer?" (5). He had no recollection of his uncle and did not know whether he was dead or alive. His brother John had inadvertently let the cat out of the bag:

> "It was bad enough to have a convert in the family - but when he became a priest..." (6).

This indicates something of William's character and throws light on the issue at stake in the play. Every sincere religious conversion implies a radical reappraisal of life in its deepest meaning and a process of adjustment to new values, but when, as in William's case, it is not just the passage from fragmentary Christian belief to a more fully integrated one, but from a militant anti-Christian, atheistic milieu to

(5) Th.P., ed. cit. p.97.
(6) Ibid. p.97.

the Catholic priesthood and the loneliness of the priestly celibacy, only the strongest faith and the sustaining power of special grace can achieve the humanly impossible. This is the extreme situation in which Greene conjures up the violent reactions of atheism when confronted with evidence for a miracle.

The argument of the play bears upon a question that has been hotly discussed by philosophers and theologians in the past and is more alive than ever today: whether an adult person, with faculties unimpaired, can honestly remain for a long time, even a life-time, without any idea that there is or at least may be a Supreme Being - what is called "negative" atheism. "Positive" atheism, or the serious effort to disprove the existence of God, is a phenomenon that is becoming increasingly widespread, as Vatican II recognizes:

> An outstanding cause of human dignity lies in man's call to communion with God... Still, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it. Thus atheism must be accounted among the most serious problems of this age, and is deserving of closer examination (7).

Physical science and technology, as such, are not concerned with transcendental problems, they are beyond their terms of reference; but scientists and technologists are also men whose spirit is open to the Absolute and to values that are

(7) Walter M. Abbot, The Documents of Vatican II, ed. cit. p.216.

not amenable to quantitative measurements. Deus est is the foundation of religion, but religion has to throw off continuously the shackles of the "Deus ex machina" mentality; viz: God is a stop-gap for our lack of scientific knowledge. As Bonhoeffer puts it:

> The only way to be honest is to recognize that we have to live in the world etsi deus non daretur. And this is just what we do see - before God! So our coming of age forces us to a true recognition of our situation vis-a-vis God. God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are standing (8).

But one thing is to outgrow the tendency to make God a substitute for knowledge and prayer a substitute for effort to better the human race, and another is to advocate atheism and the abolition of all belief in the supernatural and preternatural "as the liberation of man". In Darwin's day a number of people interpreted his evolutionary theory as implying the non-existence or the doubtful existence of God. In our day there is a type of existentialist philosophy that takes God's non-existence for granted and tries to eradicate the last vestiges, still lingering in human consciousness, of belief in God:

> Camus addressed himself to the most salient issue of the modern consciousness: how to live with direction and integrity in a world without God. For Camus, however, the absence of God was not simply a

(8) D. Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1966), pp.121-122.

> lamentable fact; it was a necessary reality. Hopes and values which reach beyond this world . he rejected as a betrayal of this world and therefore of one's fellow man. Unlike Voltaire, who said: "If God did not exist, we should have to invent Him", Camus would say, aligning himself with Bakunin: "If God <u>did</u> exist, we should have to abolish Him" (9).

It is within this atheistic mentality of the modern intellectual world that Greene writes <u>The Potting Shed</u> and explodes the bomb of a miracle, which in turn ignites and explodes the nuclear energies of atheism for the destruction of human integrity. He chooses H.C.Callifer to represent, in his obsolete writings, the pioneering atheism of the early decades of this century, and Dr. Baston's bombastic funeral oration of H.C. to represent its recrudescence in the more drastic denials of Christian hope as well as faith. The estrangement of H.C.'s brother, Father William, and of James Callifer, together with the family machinations to get James certified as insane after the funeral, symbolize the inhumanity of a world deprived of Christian faith and hope. But the grace of God will not be entirely thwarted: James realizes that his uncle's pitiful condition as a priest is the long-drawn-out result of an effort to save his life, or rather, to restore him to life after death; and his ex-wife, Sara, gives every indication that she wishes to be reconciled to him. Young Anne voices the modern renewal of interest in religion among the rising generation. Father

(9) Harvey Cox, <u>The Secular City</u> (London: SCM Press, 1967) p.70.

William is the main subject of our present study, so we shall by-pass the whole problem of miracles, their possibility, and the reliability of human witness to them as well as their significance as signs of religious credibility.

Father William Callifer, to judge from a description of his room in the presbytery, is parish priest who has been kept in the doldrums of ecclesiastical preferment. Even Dr. Baston remarked: "As a priest he isn't exactly a success" (10) and attributed his lack of promotion to the priest's fondness for the bottle. As a priest, his first concern is for his parishioners, but as a Callifer he is obsessed by the spiritual blindness of his own kith and kin, and when his nephew James showed some interest in Catholicism he felt great affection for him:

> "I loved you. Yes, I remember now how I loved you. I couldn't have a child and I suppose you took his place" (11).

The gardener's wife also remembers this and tells James: "You and he were very close". But H.C. is so zealous for the materialistic education of his household that he allows nobody to speak about God or the soul. As James says:

> "Well, God was taboo. My father had killed that superstition for his generation... We were not allowed ghost stories, either" (12).

The Gospels were a forbidden book (13). And when the priest tried to tell his nephew something about the Catholic Faith H.C. interfered:

(10) Th.P., ed. cit.p.99.
(11) Ibid. p.137.
(12) Ibid. p.114.
(13) Ibid. p.126.

> "He was a very clever man. Older and cleverer than I was. He took everything I told you and made fun of it. He made me a laughing stock before you. I had taught you about the Virgin birth and he cured you with physiology" (14).

And James, as a young boy, was so utterly confused that he went and hanged himself in the potting shed. But when, thirty years later, Father William is telling this to James he makes the surprising comment: "How right he was" and then speaks and acts as though he had not a shred of faith left in him.

"It's a terrible thing to have nothing in you" (15), he says to his housekeeper who remarked to James that all the years she had been looking after his uncle he showed no love or gratitude. And yet his memory is not dulled:

> "I've forgotten nothing. I don't like to remember, that's all. It was a terrible day for everybody. I was very angry with your father for the way he treated you. Of course he had reason, but it was a shocking thing for a boy to be brought to hang himself (16).

At the same time, Father William dismisses the possibility that a miracle took place, because a miracle would argue the existence of God, and if God existed, he, as a priest, would not be without faith. Even the Saints did not experience the "dark night" for as long as thirty years without intermittent consolation. And then he goes on to tell James what actually happened:

(14) Ibid. p.135.
(15) Ibid. p.136.
(16) Ibid. pp.136-137.

"I prayed. I was a model priest, you see, with all the beliefs and conventions. Besides, I loved you... When I had you on my knees I remember a terrible pain - here. So terrible I don't think I could go through it again. It was just as though I was the one who was strangled - I could feel the cord round my neck. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't speak. I had to pray in my mind, and then your breath came back, and it was just as though I had died instead. So I went away to bury myself in rooms like this" (17).

James's uncle had recourse to a sort of bargaining with God - or with the devil? - at that moment of supreme supplication:

> "I'd have given my life for you - but what could I do? I could only pray. I suppose I offered something in return. Something I valued - not spirits then. I really thought I loved God in those days. I said, "Let him live, God. I love him. Let him live. I will give you anything if you will let him live'. But what had I got to give him? I was a poor man. I said, 'Take away what I love most. Take... take..."

And James completed the sentence:

> "Take away my faith, but let him live" (18).

And the priest suddenly recovered his sense of faith. When asked by James: "Do you really believe...?", he replied:

> "He answered my prayer, didn't he? He took my offer. Look around you. Look at this room. It makes sense, doesn't it, now. You must forgive me. I'm tired and a little drunk. I haven't thought about that day for thirty years.....

He got up and paused and looked up at the picture of the Sacred Heart and muttered:

> "I thought I had lost Him for ever" (19).

(17) Ibid. p.137.
(18) Ibid. p.138.
(19) Ibid. p.139.

2.

Had Father Callifer lost his faith? Thirty years before, he was "a model priest" and really thought he loved God, but when he offered to God his dearest possession, the gift of faith, in exchange for his nephew's life, everything seemed to shrivel up inside him. Faith is not merely an intellectual conviction, it embraces the whole man (20) in an act and habit of absolute trust and self-surrender to God as known by the intellect through the word of God and embraced by the core of the personality:

> Paul expresses it very tersely. He says, "In hope he believed against hope" (Rom. 4:18). Faith is therefore an utter and complete trust, but not a purely subjective trust, one that I simply imagine in my own mood of the moment, but a trust in a real person, a real God, whose existence does not depend in any sense on my individual mood, but who exists in his own right. Faith is therefore, if I may call it this, a realistic trust... This realistic trust is something far deeper than a mere mental assent, even when made with God's grace. To "trust" really and totally is an active relationship between two persons; it is the total surrender of man to God as a Person, not just to things said about God (21).

Karl Barth expresses the same idea in these words:

> God takes us into His service. He does not leave us as we were, and He does not let us "know" Him as though we were independent. He becomes ALL for us (22).

(20) "Ipsum actum credere est actus intellectus assentientis veritati divinae ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motae per gratiam" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theol. II-II, q.2, art. 9). This inadequate definition has been repeated by most Catholic theologians since the Middle Ages until recently.

(21) Theo Westow, The Agony of the Church (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968) pp.76-77.

(22) K. Barth, The Faith of the Church (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1967), p.25.

Such is the faith of William Callifer: a practical, living, all-embracing faith that prompts him to enter the priesthood as a life of dedication inspired by faith and for its furtherance in self and others (23). It is this kind of faith that Christ demands for the effectiveness, even miraculous, of prayer:

> Were your faith the size of a mustard seed you could say to this mulberry tree, "Be uprooted and planted in the sea", and it would obey you (Luke 17:6).

And it is this faith that prompts Father Callifer to ask for a miracle, the return to life of his nephew James. He opens himself to God entirely - "Prayer is openness to the ground of our being" (24) - and offers to God all he holds most dear.

> Far from consisting in a simple recitation of formulas, true prayer represents a mystic state when the consciousness is absorbed in God (25).

Such a prayer is effectual beyond all our expectations:

> Prayer is always followed by a result if made under the proper conditions. "No man has ever prayed without learning something", wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson (26).

But did Father Callifer pray "under the proper conditions"? And what did he "learn" as a result? He offered to God the loss of his faith, and the result was that he seemed to unlearn everything the Faith had taught him.

Here Graham Greene has incurred heavy criticism from both

(23) See K. Rahner, Servants of the Lord (London: Burns and Oates, 1968).
(24) John A.T.Robinson, Honest to God (London: SCM Press, 1967) p.102.
(25) Dr. Alexis Carrel, Prayer (New York: Morehouse-Gorham Co., 1948) p.18.
(26) Ibid. p.31.

literary critics and theologians. He has often been questioned about it. If faith is a gift from God, it would seem that no human being is entitled to ask to be deprived of this gift once it has been bestowed. Yet Father Jorge Blajot, S.J., after stating that in The Potting Shed Greene "poses a hair-raising and extreme situation that does not easily fit into any theological category" (27), defends the author. On the other hand, John P. Murphy, S.J. concludes his study of the play with the words: "it seems to be dramatically improbable and theologically contradictory" (28). F.L. Kunkel is much more nuanced in his assessment:

> When he tenders what he loves most to God, he mistakenly assumes that the offer is accepted: he assumes that God by destroying his faith restores James to life. Feeling as he does, his belief in God naturally withers - although there is much evidence to show that it never dies - since he is tormented by the question, what kind of a miracle is it that diminishes his faith? When James at long last furnishes him with a clue to what actually happened, his question lapses into irrelevancy and his dormant faith leaps up. Let Greene himself tell us what the clue is: "The priest's offer to give up his faith in return for his young nephew's life is 'a contract made in the dark' ". When the boy lives, the priest only imagines that God has accepted his offer. But faith is "a gift from God, not a merit, and therefore was not his to give away", as is proved when he recovers faith (29)

(27) Jorge Blajot, "La renuncia a la fe de Father William Callifer", Razón y Fe, vol. 160 (1959) pp. 441-450.
(28) J.P. Murphy, "The Potting Shed" (Renascence, vol. XII, 1959, p.49.
(29) F.L. Kunkel, op. cit. p.161.

That Father Callifer did not entirely lose his faith, I quite agree. That he forfeited the "consolations" of the Faith and declared a readiness to suffer the "absence" of God in return for his nephew's life, is not a contradiction of the faith nor a giving away what does not belong to him.

My view is that we are dealing here with a mystical trial whereby, in response to Father Callifer's heroic self-offering, God purifies him and, notwithstanding certain defects that seem to mar him in the eyes of onlookers, raises him to great holiness. In other words, we are dealing with the passive "night of the spirit" so well described and so frighteningly experienced by the greatest mystical writer of the Church since apostolic times, St. John of the Cross.

But we must first ask whether the priest was justified in making such an offering, even taking it in the literal sense: the offering of his faith, not just the consolations of faith. Are there any precedents for such an offer? Was the priest deluded into thinking his loss of faith was an answer to prayer?

In the light of speculative theology it is obvious that no one can barter away one's faith "without which it is impossible to please God", because sanctification and salvation depend on faith in God, and however concerned one may be for the temporal and eternal welfare of another, charity begins at home with one's own personal union with God (30). But if Moses

(30) "debet homo magis se diligere, post Deum, quam quemcumque alium. Et hoc patet ex ipsa ratione diligendi" (Summa Theol II-II, q.26, art. 4).

could say to God, "Blot me out from the book that you have written" (31) rather than withhold forgiveness for the sins of his people; and St. Paul could write:

> I would willingly be condemned and be cut off from Christ if it could help my brothers of Israel, my own flesh and blood (32);

we are hearing the language of ecstatic love not intellectual speculation, and we must judge it accordingly. And the same applies to Father Callifer's "rash" request to God to take away his faith if only He would give back life to his nephew, and with temporal life, a continuation of the gift of Christian faith which was beginning to rescue his nephew from the atheistic environment of his family. Perhaps only converts, either from atheism or from moral insensibility, can feel something of the tremendous yearnings of the great saints whose self-concern, even in matters of salvation, is at certain moments eclipsed by their élan towards God Himself and towards their fellow men for the glory of God. It is the altruism of love at its highest peak that catches the light of God's own Benevolence and makes a reality of Christ's injunction: "Be ye

(31) Exodus 32:32. J.P. Murphy (art. cit. p.46) maintains that Moses is here speaking only of offering his life for his people's forgiveness, but the "Book" referred to seems to be the "Book of Life", the "Book of the Predestinate" (cfr. The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966) p.1447, note on Daniel 12:1.

(32) There is no need to tone down these words to accommodate them to theological categories, as Mgr. Boylan, quoted by J.P. Murphy (loc. cit.) seems to do.

perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). It is one of those epoch-making events in a person's interior ascent to God.

Father Callifer is asking for a miracle not only for the sake of James, his nephew, but also for his brother who in his writings had always been demanding "proofs" for the existence and the power of the supernatural, and for the other members of the Callifer family. Thus his offering to God is the fruit of his consuming zeal as a Callifer and as a priest. But the afore-mentioned J.P. Murphy insists that

> Instead of strengthening his faith, the miracle asked through faith destroys that same faith, at least temporarily (33),

and therefore, even from a literary point of view, lacks authenticity. I do not agree. When the priest, as Greene himself explains, "made a contract in the dark", it was a rapturous moment of surrender of everything he held most dear - <u>held</u>, in so far as it was <u>his</u> possession - so that another might be favoured with the same gift. And this in turn implied that the priest was willing to experience once again the emptiness of life without faith if only those he loved could be filled with the faith that meant so much to him. In the lives of the Saints we have similar instances of offering oneself

(33) J.P. Murphy, art. cit. p.48. William said "Take my faith away" - not "destroy" it; take away from me the awareness of faith that ministers to joy in believing.

as victim for another (34). Perhaps Greene drew on his reading of some of these instances when writing his play.

Naked faith - without feelings or even concepts to buttress it - sustained by but a candle-light of hope through the dark, is a state so painful that some of those who have been through it are at a loss for words to describe it. St. John of the Cross comments:

> Indeed, when this purging contemplation is at its height the soul is flayed alive by the shadows and groanings of death and the pains of hell, which makes one feel deprived of God and punished and cast out, and God himself wrathful and irate; all this is felt in this state; and moreover, the soul is under the fearful apprehension that it will last for ever (35).

He goes on to add that if God "did not arrange that these sentiments, when they engulf the soul, should quickly subside, it would leave the body within a very few days" (36). In his Noche Oscura the Saint describes at length the inexpressible torments of the soul when it thinks it has lived in total deceit and only despair remains.

(34) A well-known example is that of St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) who asked God to let him suffer doubts against the Catholic Faith and relieve a friend of his, a doctor of the Sorbonne. His prayer was heard and for several years he could not formulate a single act of faith. (P. Coste, Life and Labours of St. Vincent de Paul, tr. by Joseph Leonard, C.M.) (London: Burns and Oates and Washbourne, 1934), vol.1, pp.48-49.

(35) St. John of the Cross, Edicion Crítica de sus Obras (Toledo: Viuda e Hijos de Peláez, 1912), vol.2, pp.62-63 (private translation).

(36) Ibid. p.65.

St. Teresa of Avila also speaks of these aridities of soul and of the trials and temptations that assail the faith:

> ... it is unbearable, especially when followed by aridities, so that it seems that one has never remembered God, nor ever will remember Him, and that when one hears God spoken of it is as though it were of someone far away. All this is nothing... the mind is so darkened that it is unable to see the truth but only believes what the imagination represents to it, the latter becoming the lady, and what the devil offers by way of mischievous errors, in so far as the Lord allows him to in order to test the soul and even to make it understand that it is rejected by God. Many are the things that interiorly assail it and in such a sensitive and intolerable manner that I don't know what to compare it to, unless to those who suffer in hell, because while the storm rages there i no relief (37).

In the light of the above quotations we can understand the conversation between the priest and James Callifer - the pivotal point of the whole play. The priest tells James:

> "When I had you on my knees I remember a terrible pain - here. So terrible I don't think I could go through it again. It was just as though I was the one who was strangled - I could feel the cord round my neck. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't speak. I had to pray in my mind, and then your breath came back, and it was just as though I had died instead" (38).

Father Callifer's vicarious suffering now began in earnest, and the next thirty years he would share in the emptiness of those whom the Christian faith has not transformed into a "new creature":

(37) Santa Teresa de Jesús, Obras Escogidas (Moradas Sextas), ed. cit. p.170 (private translation).

(38) Three Plays, ed. cit. p.137.

> "Father! I hate the word. I had a brother who believed in nothing, and for thirty years now I have believed in nothing too" (39).

He occasionally wonders whether it is a testing of his faith rather than the lack of faith, but he cannot compare himself to the Saints, nor can he believe that the trial would last so long:

> "The saints have dark nights, but not for thirty years" (40);

and yet St. Teresa assures us:

> "I know a person who since the Lord began favouring him in the manner mentioned cannot truly say that for the last forty years he has been without pain and other ways of suffering for a single day" (41).

Father William thinks that the saints "have moments when they remember what it felt like to believe" (42), but feeling has dried up in him, and yet:

> "Do you know that at night I still pray - to nothing, to that" (he indicates the crucifix with his glass) (43).

He says "there isn't one drop of faith in him (44), but at the same time he gets up "every morning at six to make my meditation before Mass", but in such aridity that this and all his priestly duties he regards as "slave-labour", and would be emotionally

(39) Ibid. p.132.
(40) Ibid. p.137.
(41) Santa Teresa de Jesús, op. cit. p.169.
(42) Th.P., op. cit. p.137.
(43) Ibid. p.136.
(44) Ibid. p.136.

relieved if he were suspended by his bishop. Meanwhile he goes through the motions: "I abide by the rules", "I go on serving him". As he remarks to his termagant housekeeper:

> "I am a priest who does his job. I say Mass, I hear confessions; if anyone has a stomach-ache in the night, don't I go to him?" (45).

To keep at the grind for thirty years without a drop of oil to make the wheels run smoothly; to instruct and exhort others to faith and hope, and yet feel oneself abandoned and to wonder whether God exists, whether one is a victim to self-deception; to be ostracized from kith and kin and live a companionless existence for the sake of something one cannot see or feel or get one's teech into - all this argues that Father Callifer, far from losing his faith, has entered into its core and substance, into its dark recesses where the "mustard seed" is labouring before becoming a tree whose branches will give fruit and rest to the birds of the air. The play, of course, does not and cannot portray the "resurrection" of his faith after its "death", but it does indicate it in the priest himself in his nephew, and in the Callifer household.

> "He answered my prayer, didn't he? He took my offer. Look around you. Look at this room. It makes sense, doesn't it, now.... I thought I had lost Him for ever" (46).

In that room the "absence" of God is proof enough for James that God exists:

(45) Ibid. p.131.
(46) Ibid. pp.138-139.

> "I've seen that room. I've seen my uncle. I don't need any other proof of God than the lack of Him there. I've seen the mark of His footsteps going away" (47).

This is a way of saying with the scholastic and mystical theologians that the "via negativa" is the most convincing way to an awareness of God and that the night is past and day has dawned anew. And when James's mother objects:

> "But your uncle doesn't believe",

he replies:

> "Oh yes, he does. I left him praying" (48).

St. John of the Cross comments:

> Therefore, as we have said, here God is the Master and Guide of this blinded soul. Having come to realize this, well may the soul truly rejoice and say: "In darkness and secure" (49).

3.

In The Power and the Glory as well as in The Potting Shed Graham Greene portrays a priest in dire affliction who, hoping against hope and battling with fearful odds, remains at his post, but at the same time gives in to a certain weakness, that of the bottle. In other respects, Father Callifer is outstanding for his virtues: extreme patience with an overbearing housekeeper who presumes to lecture him and protect his priesthood (50) but humble enough to refrain from judging others (51)

(47) Ibid. p.150.
(48) Ibid. p.150.
(49) San Juan de la Cruz, op. cit. p.102 (private translation).
(50) Th. P., ed. cit. p.130.
(51) Ibid. p.134.

and to tear away all self-conceit (52); a man of moral courage and honesty (53); a man who shuns publicity, but who behaves courteously (54).

He is pained to know that the parish talks about his drinking and has little patience with his shortcomings, although he has to put up with theirs. His "fondness" for the bottle is exaggerated and is no argument against spiritual purification at a deeper level. On one occasion, it is true, he was unable to awake for a sick call during the night because he had drunk deeply the previous evening, and his housekeeper loses no opportunity of reminding him of it. He accepts the rebuke with shame. So also did the "whisky priest" have, besides his fondness for drink, one great lapse from sexual purity, but that did not diminish his fidelity under persecution. And neither does this "inordinate" drinking deprive Father Callifer of his basic loyalties. Moreover, as mystical writers affirm, God allows ordinary temptations and failings even in souls visited by the delights or the aridities of passive contemplation (55) and these little defects, easily observed and commented upon by others, help to ground a person more thoroughly in humility which is a basic need for receiving special graces.

(52) Ibid. p.131.
(53) Ibid. p.134.
(54) Ibid. p.133.
(55) Cfr. A.Tanquerey, The Spiritual Life (Tournai: Desclée, 1930), pp.305-306, 436-450, 590-596, 688-689. St.John of the Cross, Vida y Obras (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1964), pp.568-569.

The surroundings in which Father Callifer lives are drab and dingy, dark and dispiriting, a complete contrast to "Wild Grove" of his brother and family, but similar in many ways to his nephew's Nottingham digs. There are the old pious trappings left by a former occupant. There is the casual visitor and the anything but casual housekeeper, but the loneliness of a bachelor only serves to enhance his loneliness of spirit. He had gone from one parish to another, each time dismissed as a failure because of drink - so it was reported -; now after thirty years he is at the end of his tether. But drink does not impair the use of his faculties nor interfere with his routine of pastoral work. If he resorts to little stratagems to conceal a whisky bottle from the housekeeper, it is only to avoid her tantrums.

This is not exactly the setting usually described by hagiographers when speaking of the saints endowed with the extraordinary gifts that sometimes accompany mystical contemplation; it is usually a picture of fastings and scourgings and levitation during prayer, etc. Graham Greene is faithful to his master-theme: that God's grace is found where least expected.

Thirty years ago Father Callifer was a "model" priest adhering strictly to all the conventions of belief and practice; now the posing is over - but the sculpturing goes on within, emptying him and casting a new mould of the spirit. A fitting symbol of the Spirit's work in the Church today.

Holiness, like Christ Himself, is not manifested by pomp and display or even meticulous observance of the rules; it is a new creation - a nihilo. The "nothingness" that echoes like a refrain in the writings of St. John of the Cross is now matched by the "tragic", "the absurd", "death", and "despair" of the modern world in the throes of spiritual denudation. It is for the Church to gather both negations and bring about a new affirmation of springtime resurgence. Father Callifer thus represents the Church in the painful process of renewal.

4.

The whisky priest in The Power and the Glory is a priest undergoing a moral crisis; Father Browne, in The Living Room represents the priest in a pastoral crisis; now in The Potting Shed we see a priest in the throes of an intellectual crisis. It is thirteen years since Graham Greene gave us this dramatic illustration of a priest's intellectual crisis, at a time when most priests rather prided themselves on having all the answers to the most important questions concerning life and death, salvation and damnation, at a time when the Catholic Church was extolled by members and even friendly outsiders as a Rock of Strength and a Beacon of Light in a world lashed by every gale of doubt and denial. There were indeed rumblings of discontent with textbook answers and canonical procedures as inadequate to the real situation and genuine human relationships, but few

priests thought that the crater of the theological volcano was active and boiling to eruption. Now, in the last few years, we are witnessing an intellectual crisis.

> The priests today are men in crisis. For some of them the crisis is quite clearly seen; for most it is rather uneasily sensed. The crisis is heightened by the fact that those who seem least perceptive of it are those of the "official Church" (56).

> Every day is a new day in the life of a priest. This looks a truism, but it expresses something of the complexity and fluidity, the heart-searching, uncertainty and anguish, of the pastoral ministry (57).

We have to congratulate Graham Greene on his sensitiveness and his skill in symbolizing for us this intellectual crisis in words and situations that freely but correctly interpret the factors involved. He is not writing a theological treatise, but because "theology is the heart of Greene's play" (58), it is necessary to listen to the voice of the layman when he speaks sincerely. That this play is a work of fiction where for dramatic purposes the characters and situations drawn verge on the improbable should not blind us to the realism of the essential elements woven into the theme. Nor is the "miracle" the stumbling-block to realism. Miracles do happen in this century as they happened in the first century A.D. and as Christ Himself foretold they would happen. What Greene wants to clarify is

(56) David P.O'Neill, The Priest in Crisis (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p.10.
(57) Brian Passman, The Experience of the Priesthood (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968), p.1.
(58) J.P. Murphy, art. cit. p.48.

the need in the modern world for a faith that can work miracles if Christianity is to rescue the world from insanity and suicide, and that priests above all men must be men of faith and hope and charity who, while mixing with the world, will bring the world something that no amount of culture, science, technology, or natural wealth can give: the Spirit of God preparing for the Kingdom of God.

A crisis is a judgement - either of innocence or of guilt, - and primarily self-judgement. The background to The Potting Shed is the crisis of rationalism; the heart of the play is the crisis of the Church represented by Father Callifer. The falseness of rationalism is its unwillingness to face evidence for something it has rejected; belief in the supernatural and preternatural, and the underhand methods its votaries resort to in an effort to hush up disturbing voices. The falseness of certain pietistic stances within the Church is the failure to come to grips with the deeper implications of the Church's mission as the Sacrament of salvation for the whole world and the primacy of interior worship in everyday secular life instead of restricting her activities to the solacing of the "chosen few" who never seem to grow up.

In Father Callifer we have a priest who really feels what it is to be without faith, who, in a manner inexplicable to himself and forgetful of his self-offering, is overwhelmed by

sheer boredom and a sense of meaninglessness in all his priestly work. Surely this is Greene's parable for the need of priests to know at first hand the anxieties of the world around them. For centuries now the priest has been on a pedestal, has been spiritually cosseted and cushioned from the shocks that have bewildered men of their generation. Now the Church through the Vatican Council II has matured enough in thought - the heart was always awake - to open the gates of the Fold and go in search of the ninety-nine who are straying, into the by-ways of non-Catholic and non-Christian beliefs and practices, not to condemn but to appraise, not to gainsay but to learn. The windows of the Church are open and there is a gale-force wind blowing through scattering dust but also scattering a lot of time-honoured furniture. It is a cold wind and many of the faithful are shivering - just a little taste of the weather outside. So the crisis is uncomfortable for priest and people, but the priest has to give leadership in bearing discomfort and reproducing the image of Christ crucified.

Only when the world at large can see in the Church, not a cosy sect of exclusive brethren, but a community dedicated to serve mankind and to express the unconscious hopes and longings of mankind in a grateful song of thanksgiving to the Giver of all good things, to the One in Whom all creation has been radically rescued in principle from the powers of evil and from Whom derives the glory of the shape of things to come, will the

Church be seen in its true light and either welcomed or rejected with awareness of what is at stake.

5. Conclusion

The failure of rationalism to bring love and hope into the world and the latent powers of Christianity to do just that is the underlying theme of The Potting Shed. Too many critics, I think, have missed the main point of the play because they have concentrated either on the "miracle", which to them seems childish or absurd, or on the so-called theological contradiction of a self-offering based on faith resulting in the loss of faith.

As a believer in God and in historical Christianity, Greene takes for granted the possibility of a miracle even in our own day and in our own back garden, but the road from possibility to established fact he strews with the thorns and briers of half-truth, inhumanity, and moral cowardice on one side, and on the other: simple, honest, unsophisticated witness from a poor unlettered woman, and a priest whose main witness is his wretchedness of spirit. All the clever people seem to be ranged against the miracle's ever having taken place. But James, who has suffered from amnesia since he was restored to life and has been kept in ignorance of what happened, gradually pieces together a number of clues pointing in the direction of something mysterious, and when he learns from his uncle's own lips the facts he realizes their implications. However, it

takes the witness of his uncle's spiritual martyrdom to turn mere awareness into the surrender of belief.

This is Greene's way of saying that rationalism is not the answer and that the Catholic Church does have the answer but it must be given at a high price, that of spiritual renewal as well as structural reform. In the play, James is not "converted" in the full sense of the word:

> "O prayer. I don't want to pray. Something happened to me, that's all, like a street accident. I don't want God. I don't love God. But He's there - it's no good pretending. He's in my lungs like air" (59);

but grace has begun to stir in him.

The effectiveness of prayer when it enlists the whole heart, mind, and soul of man, and the need for this sort of prayer in the Church to bring about the "miracle" of conversion of an unbelieving generation, the "coup de grâce" to a rationalism that is now defunct and is turning into the corruption of despair of everything human let alone divine, is aptly symbolized in the play. It is outside my scope to comment on Greene's marshalling of evidence for the miracle, but it is fair to say that stubborn resistance to belief when belief threatens vested interests has close parallels in the Gospels (60) as compared with the play, and also reminds one (61) of

(59) Th.P., ed. cit. p.149.
(60) Cfr. for example: John 12:10; John 9:1-41; Matt. 28:12-13.
(61) Th.P., ed. cit. pp.142, 143, 144.

those who, like Nicodemus visiting Christ by night, are secretly convinced that the cosmos is not a closed system but are afraid to declare their convictions openly. My main contention here is that the priest, sharing in the dark night of seeming unbelief in order to be instrumental in the salvation of unbelievers, is like Christ who "was made into sin" (2 Cor. 5:21) although sinless Himself - as a consequence of his complete self-offering for the conversion of his family. Even if what happened in the potting shed had not been a miracle in the strict sense of the word, Father Callifer's prayer was startingly effective because God took him at his word. This is in contrast with the word of men like his brother, or Dr. Baston, or of atheistic humanism in general. So the parable is meant to illustrate the effectiveness and permanence of the Word of God against the ever-changing moods and tenses of the word of man when spoken at variance with the Word of God. And it is the Word of God that is our secret of strength in tribulation and the Rock on which the future of the world securely rests. Graham Greene is still the prophet of hope (62).

Suicide and resurrection (or rather, restoration) from the dead are two themes that have held a fascination for Graham Greene since the beginning of his writing career (63). Maurice

(62) Ibid. pp. 149, 150.
(63) Ronald Matthews, in his book Mon Ami Graham Greene (pp.60-64) tells us how Greene was in danger of killing himself by playing Russian roulette with his father's revolver. In Greene's The Revolver in the Corner Cupboard, an essay, he relates how as a youth he was obsessed with the idea of suicide (Philip Stratford: "Unlocking the Potting Shed", Kenyon Review, vol. 24 - Winter, 1962; p.131).

Bendrix, in The End of the Affair, is preserved from death in answer to Sarah Miles's prayer, but for Sarah it was as though he had risen from the dead. In two of his short stories: The Second Death (1929) and Proof Positive (1930), Greene deals with the resurrection. In the first he refers to "a man who'd been born blind" (64) and to the way this man on his second death bed relates what he saw in the next world after his first death; the words he uses recall those spoken by James to his priest uncle concerning his resurrection. In Proof Positive we are told of "the local Psychical Society" (65) and about doctors who certify death - "The man must have been dead for a week" (66).

Some critics place this play "between his serious novels and his entertainments" (67), but my contention is that it should be placed among his most profound theological parables, and that it deals, and deals successfully, with the power of prayer in faith to which all things are possible.

The core and substance of The Potting Shed is philosophical and theological, and its form is on the whole appropriate. Emotion is strongly stirred by the fate of each of the

(64) Graham Greene, Twenty-One Stories (London: Heinemann, 1960) p.153.
(65) Ibid. p.106.
(66) Ibid. p.110.
(67) T.C. Worsley, "The English-Theatre-at-its-Best", New Statesman, vol. 45 (15 February 1958), p.196.

characters and by the progressive action of the play until the end. And in this respect I think Greene was right to revert to his original version of the third act in the British edition and staging. The most interesting and perhaps the most perfect scene is that of the presbytery when Father William and his nephew James meet after thirty years; there everything falls into place. Nor is it marred by the appearance of Miss Connolly, the priest's housekeeper; whether she is the "typical" priests' housekeeper or not she is certainly drawn from real life. She reminds one of J.F. Powers' short story, "The Valiant Woman" (68).

Perhaps the main defects of the play are: the unwarranted obtuseness of Dr. Baston and his complete lack of logic; Mrs. Callifer's unnatural lack of love for her son James, to the extreme of concocting and signing with others a promise to keep him away from the family and never to disclose the reason why (69), and Anne's unnatural precociousness which manifests itself in a number of aphorisms quite out of context with her age (70). But these defects do not prevent its being a good play. There are more characters in it than in The Living Room, there is more movement, and much more suspense.

(68) J.F. Powers, Prince of Darkness (New York: Image Books, 1958), p.117.

(69) Th.P., ed. cit. p.105.

(70) Ibid. p.81.

The very fact that The Potting Shed has been the target of so much cross-fire both from literary and theological critics ensures that it will receive the attention it deserves and will not be allowed to gather the dust of forgotten book-shelves.

CHAPTER SIX

THE PRIEST IN GREENE'S LATER NOVELS

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1. THE HEART OF THE MATTER (1)

The Story

The Heart of the Matter, first published in 1948, tells the story of a Deputy Commissioner of Police, Scobie, in Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa, in time of war.

The environment in which the story develops is that of a tropical climate that plays havoc with people's nervous constitution, especially of Europeans: unbearable heat, monotony of daily routine, constant fever attacks in a cosmopolitan milieu riddled with moral and political corruption. The physical environment is reminiscent of Tabasco, in The Power and the Glory, whereas the spiritual and social milieu has something of Brighton in his novel Brighton Rock.

The leading character of the story, Scobie, is a man of great professional integrity who for fifteen years has battled against vice and illegal trafficking in diamonds, so much so

(1) All the quotations are from Graham Greene, The Heart of the Matter (London: Heinemann, 1960).

that he has earned the title of "The Just". At first he lived a bachelor's life in the colony, but later on was joined by his wife Louise.

Louise is bored and wants to go for a protracted holiday to South Africa, and Scobie, although desperately short of money, rashly promises to pay all her expenses. He knows how disappointed she is because he has not been promoted to Commissioner of Police, and compromises his own integrity in order to secure the money she needs. The banks refuse to give him a loan, and he accepts money from a certain Yusef, a Syrian merchant of ill-repute who is only too glad to get Scobie into his clutches as the one remaining obstacle to his schemes for illegal trafficking.

During his wife's absence Scobie meets and commits adultery with a young widow, Helen, who was saved from shipwreck in which her husband was drowned after only one month of married life. A love-letter from Scobie to Helen falls into Yusef's hands, who blackmails Scobie into being his accomplice in his illegal transactions. Louise in South Africa hears rumours of her husband's infidelity and returns unexpectedly to Freetown where, to confirm or dispel the rumours, she has recourse to a stratagem: she asks her husband to accompany her to Mass on Christmas Eve and receive Communion. Scobie, a believing Catholic convert, is caught between his passionate attachment to Helen and his fear of receiving Holy Communion in the state of mortal sin. He is

unwilling to break with Helen, and therefore he knows his confession to a priest would be spurious; so he tries all sorts of dodges and excuses for not accompanying his wife to Communion. In view of her insistence and increasing suspicion, he goes to Communion repeatedly without a proper Confession beforehand, and gradually sinks into a condition of despair. He feigns angina, saves up tablets of evipan, and finally swallows an overdose that kills him.

FATHER RANK (2)

The Catholic priest, Father Rank, plays a brief and intermittent part in the story, but that part is all-important for an understanding of Graham Greene's idea of the priesthood and of the theological dimension of his novel.

Father Rank appears on five occasions, and each occasion adds something to his stature. He is introduced as a congenial matter-of-fact sort of person "shaking his grey tousled head" and filling the room with boisterous laughter (3). Very different from the whisky priest "in a shabby, dark suit", he wears a long soutane, and when he argues, his voice resounds across the room.

Greene emphasizes the priest's loudness of speech as many

(2) At this stage I give only a very brief outline of Father Rank's physical appearance and general character, reserving for later on a discussion of his priestly mentality and approach as revealed in his dealings with Scobie and Louise at crucial moments of their tragedy.
(3) H.M., pp. 78 and 79.

as six times. He has been twenty-two years on the foreign missions and has lost all concern about conventionalities in dress and manner. At the house of another Syrian merchant, Tallit, he will invite himself to eat and drink with great informality. He had a gourmet's knowledge of the local cuisine and was always ready with gastronomic advice to Europeans new to the country. He knows that a priest should not be choosy in matters of food and drink, but he welcomes and relishes a good meal. His speech in ordinary conversation can be as familiar and blunt as that of any other white man in the colony. For instance:

> "Yusef humbugged you, eh, Tallit, you young rogue? Not so smart, eh? You a Catholic humbugged by a Mahommedan. I could have wrung your neck" (4).

In this he was a far cry from Father Browne, of The Living Room, for example, who in the solitude of his wheel-chair developed a speech of almost mathematical exactitude. He was also most unlike the whisky priest who mostly communicated in whispers. Again:

> "Wish you'd confess to me where you get this whisky from, Tallit", Father Rank called out with the roguery of an old elephant (5).

He has shafts of irony and sarcasm:

> "So the Esperança's gone out", Father Rank shouted across the room. "Did they find anything, do you think?" (6)

(4) Ibid. p.77.
(5) Ibid. p.76.
(6) Ibid. p.76.

He is alert to all that goes on around him (7). He admits that his head is "a hive of rumours". Tallit thinks he should have been a policeman (8). He knows all the influential people in the colony and can sometimes be devastating in his criticisms, such as when he calls Yusef "a dirty dog" and comments:

> "If I saw a girl enter Yusef's house, I'd pity her; but if Tallit went in I'd wait to hear her screams for help" (9).

He knows that Yusef covets Tallit's large house across the street, that the police are getting nowhere in their fight against smuggling and corruption, and that they merely "pounce on air". He also is one of the first to realize that Major Scobie has fallen a prey to the Syrian merchant.

This wide-awakeness of Father Rank is controlled by a sense of justice. As he said to Wilson:

> "Not that you can believe a single thing you hear in this place. Otherwise everybody would be living with someone else's wife, every police officer who wasn't in Yusef's pay would be bribed by Tallit here" (10).

But part of his mission in life is to unmask insincerity:

> "If a man tells me anything, I assume he wants me to pass it on. It's a useful function, you know, at a time like this when everything is an official secret, to remind people that their tongues were made to talk with and that the truth is meant to be spoken about" (11).

(7) In this respect alone Fr. Rank recalls Fr. Rothschild portrayed by Evelyn Waugh in Vile Bodies (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), pp. 13 and fol.
(8) H.M., p.76.
(9) Ibid. p.79.
(10) Ibid. p.77.
(11) Ibid. pp. 78-79.

The courage and perseverance of the "whisky priest" in "The Power and the Glory" is matched by that of Father Rank who moves in a milieu in some respects more degrading and unchristian than that of Tabasco. There is no violent persecution of religion and its ministers, but there is a greater sapping of spiritual energies, and even the police are mostly of a lesser moral stature than the fanatic lieutenant. Father Rank's twenty-two years in the colony have been a slower martyrdom than the whisky priest's eight years on the run in Mexico. In fact, Greene's use of "hollow sound", "hollow laugh" when describing Father Rank recalls the "hollow face" and the "hollow man" of Tabasco. Both priests suffer bouts of depression, especially during the rainy season:

> For twenty-two years that voice had been laughing, joking, urging people humorously on through the rainy and dry months (12)

and for twelve years he had not taken a holiday, although he saw the need of it in others and would even prescribe it as a penance for sin if he were free to do so. His cheerfulness cloaked, not perhaps a great inner tension bordering on despair, but a continual feeling of frustration and disappointment that his ministry seemed to bear such little fruit. In theory he knew what St. Paul had written:

> I planted, Apollo watered, but God gave the increase" (I Cor. 3:6)

but in practice hs saw little of that increase. No wonder that

(12) Ibid. p.78.

the observant Wilson detected hollowness in the priest:

> Could its cheeriness ever have comforted a single soul? Wilson wondered. Had it even comforted itself? (13),

and failed to realize that a priest is often required to see only briars and thorns and to wait in patience for someone else to reap what he had sown.

In 1968 Greene revisited the "soup-sweet land" of Freetown where he wrote some lines explaining why all his priest heroes think themselves failures in the ministry:

> I felt the guilt of a beachcomber manqué: I had failed at failure. How could they tell that for a writer as much as for a priest there is no such thing as success? (14).

This was written twenty-five years after The Heart of the Matter.

This is the first and last thing that Greene can say about the priest, and about himself: the word "success" is almost without meaning when applied to the minister of the word, whether that word be the Eternal Word made flesh or the merely human word groping to utter something of the mystery shrouding all human destiny.

The hollowness of Fr. Rank is not that of a subterranean cave that merely echoes superficial laughter, it is rather like that of the sea-shell capturing the murmur of deep waters. It

(13) Ibid. p.78.
(14) The Observer (19 May, 1968), p.17.

is a mask but not a masquerade, the typical mask of a priest who in everyday life is not disposed to reveal the secret he most dearly cherishes as instrument of the Divine Word. There is playfulness in his thoughts and words not only because, like the writer, he shares more deeply in the touch-and-go of human transitoriness, but because he is wedded to that Wisdom of which (Whom) it is written:

> I was by his side, a master craftsman,
> delighting him day after day,
> ever at play in his presence,
> at play everywhere in his world,
> delighting to be with the sons of men (Proverbs 8:30, 31).

Before we study Fr. Rank's relationship with Scobie and Louise, we shall see what the novelist tells us about their characters.

SCOBIE

1.

Scobie was an honest man and loved honesty.

> Why, he wondered,.... do I love this place so much? Is it because here human nature hasn't had time to disguise itself? Nobody here could ever talk about a heaven on earth. Heaven remained rigidly in its proper place on the other side of death, and on this side flourished the injustices, the cruelties, the meanness that elsewhere people so cleverly hushed up. Here you could love human beings nearly as God loved them, knowing the worst... (15).

He devotes all his energies to make justice, at least legal and social justice, prevail; he wants to investigate the truth.

(15) H.M., pp.33-34.

> At the beginning of his service Scobie had flung himself into these investigations: he had found himself over and over again in the position of a partisan, supporting as he believed the poor and innocent tenant against the wealthy and guilty house-owner. But he soon discovered that the guilt and innocence were as relative as the wealth (16).

Gradually he relies less on investigation and sometimes refuses to investigate, with the result that "the Just" appellative would change to "the Bad Man" on the lips of people who merely wanted to screen behind a semblance of law and order. And yet Scobie began to desire these people's trust and affection, and in the heat and damp of the climate their hostility worried him unreasonably.

Greene thus gives us a clue to Scobie's psychological make-up. He is over-sensitive, even neurotic; he is the victim of an overwrought sense of compassion wherever another's suffering comes into the picture. He has a feeling of responsibility for the happiness of others that reaches morbidity. Not only does he seek to identify with others in their suffering, he identifies co-sufferers and fails to appreciate their individualities; as was the case when he fell into compassionate love for the young widow Helen:

> He realizes that Helen is Louise and Louise is Helen, and that he is equally responsible for the happiness of both (17).

Scobie's downfall is his inability to distinguish pity from

(16) Ibid. pp. 12-13.
(17) A.A. De Vitis, Graham Greene (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. 1964), p.101.

love, or rather, in his allowing his sensitiveness to suffering to take unbridled possession of him. I say unbridled, because all human passions must be acted upon within right reason which establishes a hierarchy of goals and prudent means towards attaining each goal (18). Compassion is one of those human passive conditions that calls for action, and in Scobie it certainly did this:

> He never listened while his wife talked. He worked steadily to the even current of sound; but if a note of distress were struck he was aware of it at once (19).

In these few words Graham Greene points to an imbalance in Scobie's psychological make-up that, unrecognized and left to take its course, will lead to disaster. Love would be wider awake and try to reach out to another person in the latter's full range of interests. Compassion can degenerate into self-pity compounded with pride when one assumes one can manage and fashion another person but meets with apparent failure. Love works on the basis of equality not of mastery. Love is fraternal, at least among human beings, but Scobie is always the Master, the giver, the bounteous one. He shares things with other people very liberally, but his heart remains exclusively his own. He prided himself on being alone in his compassion:

(18) Dicendum quod passiones animae dupliciter possunt considerari: uno modo, secundum se; alio modo, secundum quod subjacent imperio rationis et voluntatis. Si igitur secundum se considerantur, prout scilicet sunt motus quidam irrationalis appetitus, sic non est in eis bonum vel malum morale, quod dependet a ratione,.. si autem considerantur secundum quod subjacent imperio rationis et voluntatis, sic est in eis bonum vel malum morale (St.Thomas Aquinas, S.T. I-II, q.25, art.1).

(19) H.M., ed. cit. p.21.

> ... the weight of all that misery lay on his shoulders. It was as if he had shed one responsibility only to take another. This was a responsibility he shared with all human beings, but there was no comfort in that, for it sometimes seemed to him that he was the only one who recognized it. In the Cities of the Plain a single soul might have changed the mind of God (20).

This unconscious pride has the effect of diminishing almost to vanishing point that hallmark of the religious man: belief and trust in Divine Providence. Scobie wants to be beholden to neither God nor man, he is the captain of his own soul in fair weather and foul. Was this attitude of mind something he had inherited from his background? Was it in the very air he breathed in a British colony? Was it part of the British way of life to muddle through difficulties without recourse to divine grace or to any form of transcendental appeal? Greene himself, speaking to Ronald Matthews, comments:

> L'éducation protestante de Scobie... l'a préparé à attacher beaucoup plus d'importance aux oeuvres qu'à la grâce (21).

Many Protestants would hotly deny this. In fact they would say that Scobie's change of allegiance to the Roman Catholic faith deprived him of that abiding sense of the Absoluteness of God's Sovereignty which was the fundamental re-discovery of the Reformation. This is not the place to argue the toss about Catholic v Protestant; one fact is clear, among Catholics there is a deeper insight into the workings of divine grace; there is, in general, a stronger grasp of the need for grace, but a man is

(20) Ibid. p.139.
(21) Ronald Matthews, op. cit. p.249.

not merely passive under the impulse of grace. We are dealing with a man whose background is only nominally protestant, it would seem; he is a "convert" only superficially. It is Pelagian self-sufficiency not Protestant Christianity which gives priority to "works" over faith.

Nor is Scobie merely the Good Samaritan who gives practical aid in distress without making a distinction between Jew and Gentile. Greene tells Matthews that neither Jacques Madaule nor Père Blanchet really understood Scobie's character:

> Le père Blanchet ne l'avait pas compris, voilà tout, en ce qui concerne Scobie... Scobie n'a pas du tout été présenté comme un personnage admirable, et Madaule n' pas moins tort à son sujet. Ce n'est pas la divine charité qui l'a conduit au suicide, c'est la passion destructrice de la pitié, qui faisait partie de son orgeuil (22).

The destructive power of pity divorced from reason and divine love - that is the "heart" of The Heart of the Matter as exemplified in Scobie who will not confide in the priest and will not establish a really loving personal relationship with God.

It has been said that pity is the ethic of those who try to substitute themselves for God, but this is true only when pity is blind both to the Divine Reason for allowing suffering to exist and to one's own limitations in dealing with suffering. And this was Scobie's plight. At the root of his morbid sensitiveness is a spirit of revolt against the very idea that

(22) Ibid. p.249.

suffering should be allowed to exist. He thus calls in question the Fatherhood of God and regards God more like a very important person. The spirit of revolt suggests that God is indifferent to the fate of His own victims, and thinks God is some way to blame for all suffering on earth. He even wanders into blasphemy saying he would rather God suffered than any of the people he loved. He dismisses almost with contempt the Catholic Church's grave warning of the existence and eternity of Hell (23). Consequently, his prayer is mechanical and routine, lip-service to the One Above. His religious mentality is warped by fear, all because pity stems from pride and not from love. And this false pity corrupts. However the full nature of Scobie's corruption is not revealed to us till the end of the novel.

2.

Scobie, who for fifteen years in Freetown has lived alone without his wife, is reputedly an upright man, a man of professional integrity. He does not mind being alone, in fact he has a deep desire for solitude. At the same time he is abnormally sensitive to the whims of women (24), and when his wife rejoins him and soon gets bored with her surroundings there comes about a conflict between his desire to please his wife and his pride in his own integrity as an officer of the Crown.

The first lapse from his self-imposed high ideals comes when searching a Portuguese cargo boat. There are strict orders

(23) Ibid. p.223.
(24) Ibid. p.125.

from the Foreign Office in London that all correspondence has to be sent unopened for censorship in London when such correspondence is discovered in neutral hands. Scobie discovers a letter ingeniously hidden away in the boat. He has so far resisted any temptation of bribery in terms of money - although he was desperately trying to get sufficient to pay for his wife's prolonged holiday in South Africa - but when the captain tells him the envelope contains nothing but a letter to his only daughter living in Germany, and when

> The captain moaned, 'If you had a daughter you'd understand. You haven't got one' (25)

he begins to weaken, remembering his own daughter who had died at the age of nine only three years ago. He takes the letter away. It is the only item, together with a bundle of correspondence found in the kitchens, that was discovered after an eight hours' search by fifteen men. Back in his office he writes out a report of the finding. The war with Germany was at its height. Any clandestine correspondence, however innocent in appearance, must be sent unopened for censorship in London. He argues with his conscience. He wants to open the letter. This would involve him in subterfuge and lies and "he was unaccustomed to lies". He opens the letter while alone in his office, reads it, and then tears it up. He also tears up the report he had already started to write. He sets fire

(25) Ibid. p.53.

to the bits and pieces. Corruption had set in, not by the by-way of money but by the highway of sentiment. "Sentiment was the more dangerous, because you couldn't name its price". And after reporting verbally to his fellow officers that nothing had been found, he thinks to himself: "What a fool I have been". (26)

The second lapse looks trivial, but it prepares the way for further deterioration: it is the borrowing of money to pay for Louise's holiday. And the lender is none other than Yusef, the unscrupulous Syrian merchant whose illegal trafficking would flourish unimpeded if he could stave off Scobie's powers of prosecution. Scobie fails to recognize "the enormous breach pity had blasted through his integrity" (27). The enemy of his own soul had secured a foothold within the very fortress of his personal life.

A third lapse starts with imprudence and presumption thriving on Scobie's sense of pity. The forlorn figure of the young widow, Helen, saved from shipwreck prompts him to take immediate steps to fix her up with comfortable accommodation as soon as she is able to leave hospital. So far, so good; but repeated visits to the Nissen hut and long hours spent at night in her company, on the score that "they were safe with each other", even though Scobie's wife was away in South Africa, soon becomes a temptation. And Greene gives a Christian interpretation of the situation when he writes:

(26) Ibid. p.61. (27) Ibid. p.130.

> He had the sense of an animal which had been chased to its hole... What they had both thought was safety proved to have been the camouflage of an enemy who works in terms of friendship, trust, and pity (28).

Who is the "enemy"? Scobie begins to surmise that something is amiss before he is sexually aroused, but his sense of pity drives him on and casts other considerations to the winds. He has a lurking suspicion that Someone who claimed his love beyond all other loves is warning him. On the way home one night he seems to have rediscovered something of his lost youth and tries out a line of song, but his voice is tuneless. Somewhere between the Nissen hut and home he has mislaid his joy. In the early morning he stares sleeplessly out towards the sea:

> Somewhere on the face of those obscure waters moved the sense of yet another wrong and another victim, not Louise, nor Helen (29).

Greene ends part one of Book Two with the significant phrase:

> Away in the town the cocks began to crow for the false dawn (30).

Having become indebted to Yusef for the loan of money, Scobie's power of resistance to legal corruption is lessened, and it is only a matter of days before the Syrian traps Scobie into conniving at his trafficking and even making use of his official position to further it. This is followed by a proposal that Scobie should connive at the murder of his own faithful servant Ali. Greene's biographer, Ronald Matthews, complained

(28) Ibid. p.190.
(29) Ibid. p.192.
(30) Ibid. p.192.

to Greene (31) that these last two lapses seemed altogether out of character in Scobie, but when we consider that Yusef had taken possession of a letter written by Scobie to Helen and threatened to give it to Louise if he did not co-operate, we can understand how desperate Scobie was to avoid humiliation and the discovery of his weaknesses. "Scobie the Just has penetrated the land of lies and without a passport for the return journey".

In the "land of lies" Scobie feels he owes it to himself to preserve appearances of uprightness and innocence. Rumours are flying around. Unexpectedly Louise announces an early arrival from South Africa. But now it is not the Syrian who sets the trap, it is Louise herself. She invites her husband to accompany her to Mass on Christmas Eve and to receive Holy Communion with her. Scobie was faced with a choice between his own pride and pity for Louise and Helen on the one hand and the need for repentance in order to avoid a sacrilegious Communion. Conniving at injustice, committing adultery, yes he knew they were wrong but he had followed his compassionate tendencies in doing them,

> But the other - the other's really evil. It's like the Black Mass, the man who steals the sacrament to desecrate it. It's striking God when he's down - in my power (32).

After an initial loathing for anything to do with sacrilege his pride reasserts itself and despair takes over:

(31) R. Matthews, op. cit. p.246.

(32) H.M., p.253.

> He thought hopelessly: I am damned already - I may as well go the whole length of my chain (33).

Torn between his pity for others and his resentment that the love of God should take priority over everything else Scobie found himself in a blind alley. He stalled as long as he could, trumping up excuses for not going to Communion with his wife after her return from Durban, but eventually he took the plunge. With a great struggle he went to confess his sins to Father Rank, or rather, he went to the priest hoping for a miracle, for just the right word that would square his conscience with his unbalanced sense of pity. Adultery he knew was wrong, but how could he abandon Helen to the lusts of a ruffian like Bagster who was importuning her? How could he prefer the salvation of his own soul to the salvation of real people of flesh and blood whom he knew and loved? How could he be sorry for having followed the dictates of his sensitive heart? Nor could be promise "purpose of amendment" in the ordinary humdrum meaning of that word. He left the confessional without absolution.

The following day, having exhausted all his excuses to Louise for not going, he went to Mass with her, even though she, detecting his reluctance, and perhaps guessing his conflict of conscience, offered to leave him in the house while she went to church.

> Once and for all now at whatever eternal cost, he was determined that he would clear himself in her eyes, and give her the reassurance she needed (34).

(33) Ibid. pp.268-269. (34)Ibid. p.269.

He tried to pray, but the fear and the shame of the act he was going to commit chilled his brain. He was desecrating God because he loved a woman, not because he hated God or loved evil. Loved? He had a sneaking suspicion that it was just a feeling of pity and responsibility. He argued with his conscience. He tried to argue with Christ and Christ's absolute claims. At the moment of receiving Communion he muttered:

> "O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them" (35).

From that day onwards Scobie fell into supreme dejection of spirit until he terminated his own life by swallowing an overdose of evipan pills.

LOUISE SCOBIE

Since our main study concerns Graham Greene's understanding and portrayal of priests in The Heart of the Matter, and therefore of Father Rank in his dealings with Major Henry Scobie, I do not wish to be side-tracked by a detailed discussion of Mrs. Scobie's character and role. Suffice it to say that she appears as anything but a help-mate to her husband or a model of genuine Christian piety. She is a weak character, a neurotic, always complaining of her lot, and unequal to the task of giving support and inspiration in such a depressing milieu and environment as that of Freetown. In her practice of the Catholic Faith she recalls the self-complacent priggishness of the woman reproached

(35) Ibid. p.272.

by the whisky priest in prison, in The Power and the Glory, and Fr. Browne's sister Helen, in The Living Room. She spends her time aimlessly and listlessly, like so many other wives of British officers on colonial duties, but with an interest in the arts - something that Major Scobie completely lacks. She has a woman's intuition for detecting Scobie's weaknesses and literally trades on them. She suspects her husband's infidelity while she is away in South Africa and does not scruple to make use of what is most sacred in Catholicism - the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist - in an effort to establish whether he is deceiving her or not. Just as Fr. Browne, at the end of The Living Room, administers to Helen a sharp rebuke about the staleness and narrowness of her religious outlook and her misjudgement of Rose, so does Fr. Rank upbraid, however gently, Mrs. Scobie for failing to appreciate her husband while he was with her and for judging superficially the secret of his eternal destiny.

Nor was Louise herself entirely the innocent party. Her flirtations with Wilson were deliberately indulged in to provoke her husband to jealousy. She knew little about real love. She had no great opinion of Father Rank and compared him unfavourably, from an intellectual point of view, with a priest she heard preach in Durban. Fr. Rank's priestly character and ministry does not reveal itself in his dealings with Louise, so we shall concentrate on Fr. Rank and Scobie. (36)

(36) There is a new passage in the Collected edition, from which Louise emerges more sympathetic. H.M., Collected edition (London: Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1971), pp. 79-86.

FATHER RANK AS A WISE CONFESSOR

It is significant that in 1948, when Greene wrote this novel, the general usage was for priests in the confessional to be somewhat scrupulous in putting into effect the prescription of the Council of Trent, that all "mortal sins" should be declared to the confessor in "number and kind" to enable the priest to judge whether the penitent was sincere in his sorrow for the past misdeeds and genuinely determined to make up for them and to avoid them in the future. Also there was considerable concern about giving a "penance" proportionate to the sins confessed. This scrupulosity often led to tiresome questioning of the penitent on the part of the priest and stressed the judicial side of the Sacrament at the expense of its main purpose: the gratuitous bestowal of Christ's forgiveness through the Church.

One of the main features of Father Rank's dealings with Scobie in the confessional, as given by Greene, is the simplicity and brevity of his approach together with an understanding that here was a white man in a position of authority as regards his professional duties, but inwardly a "mixed-up" adolescent, from a spiritual point of view. Not for Scobie was there need to probe into niceties and nuances of the "nastiness" of his situation. There were a thousand factors making for diminishment of culpability. His real faults were not those of Mass-missing or just bad temptations half-consented to. There was

something in Scobie that an honest confession called for but which could not be teased out of him by scolding or even gentleness. There was something deep in Scobie that Scobie himself was hardly aware of, and yet it was playing havoc with him at all levels. If only the Major would forget his "responsibilities" and open up his real self denuded of all camouflage and pretence. He accuses himself of "doing the minimum" for his spiritual welfare. And then, a long pause....

> "Is that everything?" Fr. Rank asked.
> "I don't know how to put it, Father, but I feel - tired of my religion" (37).

1.

The priest in the confessional has to decide whether to "forgive sins" or to "retain them", because he is acting as a minister of the Church to which Christ bequeathed His own power of "binding and loosing" in matters pertaining to "the Kingdom of God"; consequently there must be genuine visible signs of repentance before the priest can "absolve" in Christ's name. The sincere declaration of grievous sins by the penitent to the Church as Christ's "community of reconciliation and peace" is, in normal circumstances, a sine qua non for sacramental absolution. Many people find it difficult and distasteful to make a clear and complete avowal of what they know in their hearts has estranged them from the love of God and of their fellow men, but they also realize that whereas they may "get

(37) Ibid. p.181.

away with it" in the eyes of a priest, they cannot escape the gaze of the High Priest, the Risen Christ, who reads their inmost depths. Any form of deception, if deliberate, is a mockery of the Sacrament of Penance.

On the other hand, the priest must take a penitent's word for it. He cannot parley with him or even cast a shadow of doubt upon the penitent's sincerity. He cannot have recourse to extra-sacramental knowledge to form a judgement of his penitent's condition in matters pertaining to the latter's actual state of conscience. It is helpful if the priest knows the penitent outside the confessional, in order to give appropriate and practical advice on ways and means of avoiding sin and its immediate occasions, having regard to the penitent's character, situation, duties of life, etc., but the priest is not there to accuse or to amplify the penitent's self-accusation. The penitent is his own prosecution and jury and even judge, and his word stands. Which means that the priest when hearing confessions must give or withhold absolution according to the evidence presented by the penitent there and then.

All this is admirably illustrated in Greene's account of Scobie's first of the two confessions made to Father Rank at the time of the crisis. In Graham Greene's stories there are instances of two other priests hearing confessions: the anonymous priest in Brighton Rock, and the whisky priest in The Power and the Glory. It is interesting to compare Father Rank's

approach with those of the other two. All three are what one may call good confessors, but each has his own style and situation. The anonymous priest appears more patient, more fatherly, more gentle; but then he is hearing confessions at a pleasant English seaside resort, and he is an old man who "murmured" and "sighed". The whisky priest is on the run, is hastily absolving long queues of people including an "old woman", a "private soldier", etc. people who brave persecution in order to receive the Sacraments. But Father Rank "whispered monotonously" in the confessional - a contrast with his "hollow bell" of a voice resounding across the room elsewhere - and is dealing with a man in authority but also in a state of interior conflict.

Father Rank follows the classical procedure outlined for priests by textbooks of moral theology such as Noldin and Ferreres, asking the questions he considers essential. The few, well-chosen words he uses to Scobie show that he knows what he is doing and with whom. He does not indulge in emotional exhortations, which in Spanish are called fervorino, or complicated discussion. Scobie is not like the penitents who preceded him: an "old woman", "a nursing sister", "a private soldier". He is exhausted by the climate, the "box" is airless and hot, but he retains sufficient mental agility and composure to adapt himself to each kind of penitent - which in the circumstances of Freetown is quite a feat.

When Major Scobie approaches the first time, it is not obvious that he has anything very serious to declare, if by

serious we mean a concrete violation of a law of God binding under pain of forfeiting the grace of God. He has surrendered in a matter of professional integrity by contravening the Foreign Office rules in time of war and opening the correspondence of the Portuguese captain and then burnt the letter without suspecting anything amounting to espionage, thus taking the law into his own hands and perhaps impeding an innocent human relationship between father and daughter; but he doesn't mention this in confession, and the priest has no grounds for surmising it. What he does mention first, as though it were his gravest fault, is being slack with Mass attendance on Sundays and some of the Church Feast Days when Catholics are commanded to hear Mass. And when asked whether he had any reason to miss Mass or any extenuating circumstances that might lessen the fault:

> "Were you prevented from going?"

Scobie hedged a little and answered:

> "Yes, but with a little effort I could have arranged my duties better" (38).

Father Rank takes him at his word, gives no importance to Scobie's "but", and dismisses him with a small penance: one decade of the rosary, but not before he gives Scobie encouragement to say what is really troubling him. And Scobie partly responds:

> "All through this month I have done the minimum. I've been unnecessarily harsh to one of my men..."

(38) Ibid. p.180.

and then a long pause.

"Is that everything?" asked Father Rank.

To which Scobie confessed his boredom with religion, and added:

> "It seems to mean nothing to me. I've tried to love God, but ---"... "I'm not sure that I even believe".

The experience of boredom is well known, it is more a psychic than a religious condition, and yet both can coalesce to produce a state of depression that calls for prompt attention. The priest wisely tries to put Scobie at east by simply pointing to the obvious: the climate itself of Freetown is enervating, saps one's mental and muscular energy, and considerably diminishes one's alertness:

> "It's easy", the priest said, "to worry too much about that. Especially here. The penance I would give to a lot of people if I could is six months' leave. The climate gets you down. It's easy to mistake tiredness for - well, disbelief" (39).

Father Rank at once shows his humanity. He speaks as man to man, conveying the impression that he too suffers from a similar disability; then he warns Scobie not to worry, not to be obsessed by this depression, and especially not to give it a false interpretation thinking that he was the odd man out or that he was under some kind of a curse. And even if he was being tempted to disbelief, one thing is temptation and another is deliberate rejection of the Faith. In modern times when so many changes are taking place both in the world and in the Church Father Rank perceives the "vital distinction" of which

(39) Ibid. p.181.

Theo Westow speaks:

> Many Catholics, and very many non-Catholics, suffer from what they call doubts in matters of faith. It is here that the vital distinction between the actual living essence of faith and its historical and rational expression in formulae is so consoling (40).

He accordingly encourages Scobie to probe deeper into his state: is it a state of nerves or something more radical?

And Scobie has taken the cue and makes an effort to disclose his real problem:

> "I don't want to keep you, Father. There are other people waiting. I know these are just fancies, but I feel - empty. Empty".
>
> "That's sometimes the moment God chooses", the priest said.

2.

Nervous debility and disorders are not the province of the priest in the confessional, and very often, as in the case of Scobie, the only thing he can do is to try and get the penitent to distinguish these afflictions from his general "orientation" of thought and desire and to see whether a person is making a deliberate choice in one direction or another. Religion is based on moral freedom not on sensitive reaction, so when Scobie admitted his doubts were "just fancies", Father Rank could hear without surprise the word "empty" and very briefly sum up a whole mystical theology dealing with special graces and their bestowal on a soul "emptied" of itself and ready to be filled by God. But there were people waiting for

(40) Theo Westow, The Agony of the Church (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p.79.

confession, and for the present, that brief reply had to suffice. Moreover, to comfort poor Scobie still further - and thus encourage him at his own leisure to go deeper into his really spiritual condition - Father Rank "lets him off" with a small penance: five Our Fathers and five Hail Mary's.

The Indwelling of God - Father, Son, Holy Ghost - is the core of the Good News of the Gospel; God "abides" within His own creature: "If any man loves me, my Father will love him, and we shall take up our abode in him" (John 14:23). But the soul of man must be swept and garnished by the Spirit before that "indwelling" can reach any measure of plenitude. To be "in the state of grace" means to possess God and be possessed by God, but there are as many capacities for being filled with God as there are souls and as there are degrees of Christian perfection. So the "emptiness" of which Scobie spoke could well mean, as Father Rank indicated, "the moment God chooses". Was it this? Or was it a crucial turning point in Scobie's life with salvation or damnation at issue? There was no time just then for Father Rank to discuss matters more thoroughly; another opportunity would soon present itself.

Frequently in his works we see Graham Greene protesting against a certain "fussiness" as well as "fustiness" in the Catholic Church of his day, as he experienced it; he is constantly advocating openness and concentration on basic and

vital issues in the Church's witness and structures. We recall Mr. Lehr, the German Lutheran in The Power and the Glory, saying to the whisky priest:

> "It seems to me you people make a lot of fuss about inessentials (41)

and now we see Father Rank saying to Scobie, who had accused himself of doing the bare "minimum" for his spiritual welfare, simply "Is that everything?", but only after a long pause, thus giving Scobie the opportunity not for "scraping the barrel" but for insight into his basic orientation and values by which a man is judged by God. Missing Mass occasionally on Holy Days of obligation, and even dealing with his subordinates with undue harshness are faults that do not really indicate his spiritual condition. Father Rank wants Scobie to discover his real self. Is that "minimum" of observance that Scobie accuses himself of a sign of spiritual lethargy or is it that return to simplicity of which the great Catholic mystics speak, especially when they describe the "prayer of quiet"? (42). A brief and inarticulate confession by Scobie was not sufficient to answer this question, therefore Father Rank, distinguishing between sacramental confession and spiritual direction, bided his time and dismissed him with just Absolution.

That this was not just a "formula", as Scobie thought, but a first step to higher things, is borne out by what he

(41) The Power and the Glory, ed. cit. p.209.
(42) See The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross (London: Nelson, 1966) pp. 357-361.

experienced after leaving the confessional:

> It seemed to him for a moment that God was too accessible. There was no difficulty in approaching Him. Like a popular demagogue He was open to the least of His followers at any hour. Looking up at the Cross he thought, He even suffers in public (43).

One may ask whether Father Rank recognized Scobie in the confessional - a dark little cabin with a grille of wire netting - and we must answer: yes. In a colony like Freetown there were few white people, and only a small percentage were Catholics. Scobie's public school accent would give him away immediately seeing that Father Rank had visited him at home on several occasions. The priest also knew that Scobie's wife had gone to South Africa and that rumours of Scobie's nocturnal visits to Helen were rich fare for the gossipers at the club. But in the confessional the priest has to deal with evidence as the penitent presents it, he is not free to act upon hearsay outside the confessional. This no doubt inhibits the freedom of the confessor, but it leaves the penitent unfettered in his self-accusations and respects the seal of secrecy attached to the Sacrament. Even to refer to past confessions of the same penitent is not allowed unless the latter gives his express consent to the confessor.

No doubt Father Rank was exercised in mind about Scobie - the idea that all confessions are semi-miraculously erased from the memory of a priest when he leaves the box is an innocent but unfounded legend - and thought it his pastoral duty to approach

(43) H.M., p.181.

Scobie on a level of spiritual direction outside the Sacrament. Accordingly he visits Scobie later on in his own home, knowing that the Major would be alone, and hoping he would open up about his problems.

The three pages Greene devotes to this interview are of capital importance for a proper assessment of Father Rank as a worthy priest - and therefore of Greene's own conception of what a priest should be. From a literary point of view they are perhaps the best written and most significant of the whole novel. Every word is carefully chosen and Father Rank's gestures add meaning to the words and to the moment of truth confronting Scobie.

3.

Confession and spiritual direction are not synonymous but they should go hand in hand. Confession in its essentials can remain as it were in the abstract: the priest listens to a humble self-disclosure on the part of the penitent, judges that the penitent is sincere and seeks reconciliation with God through the Church to whom Christ bequeathed His power to forgive sin in His Name, and, in the Name of Christ and the whole Church, pronounces the words of Absolution. In essence there need be no further rapport between priest and penitent. Very often there is none. The priest may or may not have met the penitent outside the confessional, and even if he has, the structure of the "box" is such that everything conduces to make the communication

impersonal. Moreover, the priest is trained to efface his own personality as much as possible in order to let the gentleness and mercy of Christ reveal themselves without emotional or sentimental overtones that could distract the penitent from a straightforward approach to the Divine Master.

But, where the penitent seeks more than the bare minimum that the Sacrament can give, where there is a desire to take the priest as spiritual guide in order to advance along the way of Christian perfection, then a person will choose to reveal himself or herself much more thoroughly, will seek out a particular priest either in the confessional or outside and establish a closer relationship with him. For certain people and at certain critical moments in a person's life this quest for spiritual guidance can be of vital importance, but the choice rests with the penitent; confidences are given not extracted. And whereas the Church makes confession obligatory when there is serious mortal sin, spiritual direction is not mandatory but is greatly encouraged. In English-speaking countries this is often forgotten. People are shy to disclose their inmost thoughts even to the priest. The priest is often too "busy" with secondary matters - building, finances, social gatherings, etc. - to devote himself seriously to the delicate art and task of giving real spiritual direction.

Father Rank was a jovial companion at a social gathering but he was primarily a good shepherd of souls, and he knew that

Scobie needed spiritual direction as well as confession. But how approach him? He had to tread very carefully. He had to invite Scobie to confide in him, but very tactfully and with little or no pressure. So we see Father Rank going almost like a beggar, cap in hand, to ask Scobie for the favour of his confidence. He knows that Scobie visits the shipwrecked widow by night, he knows Scobie's generosity and acute sensitiveness to all forms of suffering, he knows how compassion, unrestrained by reason and by the grace of God, can lead him to foolishness.

Seeing that Scobie did not go to him at the presbytery, Father Rank decided to "drop in" on Scobie:

> "I was just passing by, so I thought I'd look in" (44)

as though thiswas just one of his casual visits without ulterior significance. Scobie apologizes for not having whisky in the house but offers beer or gin. And with the same casualness Father Rank remarks:

> "I saw you up at the Nissens, so I thought I'd follow you down. You are not busy?"

Mention of the Nissen huts was sufficient a clue for Scobie to gather that his conduct with Helen was worrying the priest, and yet he had said "the Nissens", not any particular hut, thus giving Scobie the chance to give Father Rank his confidence or to keep the conversation on a level of comradeship. Scobie also sees the priest pacing up and down the room restlessly while he is pouring out the drinks and hears him enquire

(44) Ibid. p.217.

about Louise. Father Rank sinks into an armchair with a drink between his knees, as though he had all the time in the world to hear Scobie out. The latter guessed what Father Rank was waiting for:

> He had the odd sense that Father Rank, like one of his junior officers, was waiting for orders

he was waiting to be of service to Scobie as spiritual guide and confessor, as a friend in need, as a representative of the all-merciful Christ who said to Mary of Magdala: "Your sins are forgiven you" but added: "Go and sin no more"; and who said to the sick man He had cured at the pool of Bethzatha: "Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14). He was waiting for Scobie to say to him: "Father, I have a problem I should like you to help me with".

Once again, there was a long pause - as in the confessional - and Scobie "cleared his throat" as though he was about to say something difficult to express; but only a platitude came out: "The rains will soon be over". But the priest, having asked about Louise, wants to keep the conversation linked with her name in order that Scobie may pronounce another name. He also asks whether Scobie will be going for a holiday to South Africa to rejoin his wife, hoping that if he does his relationship with Helen Rolt will cease. And knowing that this was a loaded question and not wishing to see Scobie's embarrassment, looked away and took a draught of his beer. Hearing

Scobie say he had postponed his leave, Father Rank countered with "Everybody needs leave", only to be told:

> "You've been here twelve years without it, Father".

The priest again got up and paced up and down the room and gave Scobie a look of "undefined appeal", and then, since the Major was loth to unburden himself, he disclosed something of his own state of affliction:

> "Sometimes", he said, "I feel as though I weren't a working man at all". (45)

He stopped and stared and half raised his hands. Scobie understood the priest's meaning, but once again rejected the invitation and gave a polite but non-committal answer:

> "There's no one works harder than you, Father".

The next few exchanges drifted away from the sensitive point, but certain gestures of Father Rank's were calculated to keep the problem to the fore. An African woman was dying some distance away, and the priest commented:

> "The dying.. that's what I'm here for. They send for me when they are dying"

and again "he raised eyes bleary with too much quinine and said harshly and hopelessly":

> "I've never been any good to the living, Scobie".

Scobie protested, but Father Rank continued and went straight to the point at issue:

> "When I was a novice, I thought that people talked to their priests, and I thought God somehow gave the right words. Don't mind me, Scobie, don't listen to me. It's the rains - they always get

(45)Ibid. p.218.

> me down about this time. God doesn't give the right words, Scobie..." (46).

He went on to speak of his ministry in a Northampton parish where the people were generous with money and help for church repairs and all the material side of the parish, but somehow he felt unable to get into their real selves. He thought Africa would be different, people would be more open and ready to be helped. He was not a "reading man", nor did he ever, he thought, "have much talent for loving God as some people do". "I wanted to be of use, that's all", he said. And then he confessed to Scobie that he hadn't talked to a soul like this "for five years" - "except to the mirror".

> "If people are in trouble they'd go to you, Scobie, not to me. They ask me to dinner to hear the gossip. And if you were in trouble, where would you go?"

Such a pointed question was accompanied once again by a penetrating look from his "bleary and appealing eyes waiting through the dry seasons and the rains, for something that never happened".

Here was a man in agony, a priest who had longed to be of real service to people at some moment of spiritual crisis, and that moment had arrived with Scobie, but the priest's ministrations went uncalled for. Father Rank was not simulating he was laying bare his soul as though Scobie were his spiritual director. He was willing to humble himself before Scobie to awaken Scobie's sense of compassion and thereby get Scobie to

(46) Ibid. p.218.

feel the gravity of his own situation. Nowhere else in his writings does Graham Greene emphasize so much a priest's words and gestures and stress the accent of "appeal". The whole meaning and relevance of the priestly ministry is summed up in this very human man-to-man encounter whose ultimate significance is the appeal of God to His creature to repent, to return to Him with sorrow for past wrongdoing and a resolve to reject whatever estranges man from his Creator.

Scobie felt an impulse to lower the drawbridge of his jealously guarded soul:

> Could I shift my burden there, he wondered;
> could I tell him that I love two women:
> that I don't know what to do? (47)

but what could the priest tell him he did not know already? -

> I know the answers as well as he does.
> One should look after one's own soul at whatever cost to another, and that's what I can't do, what I shall never be able to do. It wasn't he who required the magic word, it was the priest, and he couldn't give it.

Scobie decides he has a problem beyond the judgement and competence of the Church, so with an arrogance born of proud self-sufficiency and ignorance of the true meaning of love, he covers up by simply telling a barefaced lie:

> "I'm not the kind of man to get into trouble, Father. I'm dull and middle aged"

and turned away not to see distress written on the priest's face.

It was for Scobie to pronounce the "magic" word, the

(47) Ibid. p.219.

"open sesame" to his own soul, but he refused it, and the doors remained closed behind which the seed of corruption was growing towards his own undoing.

Throughout this interview Father Rank is presented as a truly zealous priest endowed with humility, intelligence, and prudence. Greene depicts the thorny problem of a priest who has outside information about a penitent that could be the basis of some very much needed advice, but because it is linked up with the penitent's sacramental confession, he is not free to use it without an express approval of the penitent, not even when alone with him, Scobie was in a very serious predicament: not only was his marriage in danger, his whole spiritual orientation was at stake. Until the crisis came, Scobie had been to confession every first Saturday of the month (48) and routine had set in, not only for Scobie but perhaps also for the priest who, exhausted by the enervating climate, had failed to notice his penitent's psychological complexity and the real direction of some of his inner drives. Scobie was, by common consent, a man of principle striving to do his best against fearful odds to make justice prevail around him, and his simple confessions were taken at their face value; but circumstances had conspired to reveal something deeper and sinister, and the priest was now eager to give a helping hand, but only at Scobie's invitation, which was not forthcoming. It was a sad and painful situation given concrete expression by Greene in Father

(48) Ibid. p.179.

Rank and Scobie, but, like most of the themes in Greene's more serious writings, it represented a problem facing the whole Church vis-a-vis the whole world: would the Church ever win the confidence of the world of ordinary men and women, and would people acknowledge the Church's divine mission to extend to the world redemption in Christ? When all is said and done about unworthy or mediocre ministers of the Gospel, there are always priests to whom the world can turn for healing and comfort; and there is always the possibility of man's rejection of the proffered grace.

The five interventions of Father Rank in the story are all closely interrelated, each one preparing for the next. So far we have seen Scobie in dialogue with the priest first in the confessional and then at home. Now let us consider Scobie's second confession.

4.

All Father Rank's efforts at the interview in Scobie's home seemed to end in failure (49). But faced with another request from Louise to accompany her to the altar rails, Scobie resolved to make a clean breast of it in the confessional. He remembered every word and every gesture of the priest at the interview

> "when Father Rank had nearly broken down before him, admitting his failure to help" (50),

and, although he himself was on the horns of a dilemma:

(49) The sense of failure is a characteristic of nearly all Graham Greene's priest protagonists.
(50) Ibid. pp.265 and 266.

"to leave Louise, forget that private vow, resign my job. To abandon Helen to Bagster or Louise to what?.."

he thought

a miracle still may happen. Even Father Rank may for once find the word, the right word....

Miracles, however, are few and far between; nature follows its course and grace builds on and with nature. Scobie wanted not a miracle but a contradiction of God's expressed Will: he wanted two wives at the same time because he loved both women on account of their weaknesses and failures; he wanted God's pardon for something he did not recognize as wrong in itself but only because the Law said "thou shalt not covet", "thou shalt not commit adultery"; he wanted God's love on his own terms not on God's.

The situation for Father Rank was a difficult one. He had to bear witness to certain basic Christian principles and yet he was dealing with a man emotionally unbalanced who really thought or rather felt that "the saving of his own soul" was in conflict with his concern for others - for Helen whom he had to save from despair or from the clutches of a lout like Bagster or of any number of dire possibilities for which he was in some obscure way responsible if he gave her up and remained faithful to Louise. He did not trust in God sufficiently to convince himself that God would provide without his taking the law into his own hands. He did not come to terms with his own limitations, and yet he felt trapped.

Scobie knelt down in the church before going into the confessional and whereas even the familiar words of the "Our Father" and the "Hail Mary" deserted him, a host of remembrances calling for pity and rescue came crowding into his imagination: the face of a dying child who called him father, the face of a black girl of twelve raped by a sailor and killed, the face of his own daughter who had died three years before; and all he could say was

> "O God, convince me, help me, convince me.
> Make me feel that I am more important than
> that child... Make me put my own soul first.
> Give me trust in your mercy to the one I abandon" (51)

as though the three children added up to one child - Helen Rolt.

> "Since my last confession I have committed adultery"
> "How many times?"
> "I don't know, Father, many times".
> "Are you married?"
> "Yes".

While engaged in this abstract almost clinical and soulless dialogue Scobie was remembering the previous interview at home and wondering whether Father Rank was also thinking about it. He felt an urge to be more explicit and open, to ask the priest to get him out of his dilemma, but he remained closed to all but laconic answers.

> "Is it one woman?"
> "Yes".
> "You must avoid seeing her. Is that possible?"

He shook his head.

> "If you must see her, you must never be alone with her.
> Do you promise to do that, promise God not me?"

(51) Ibid. p. 265.

There was no "magic" in all this, it was as plain as a pike-staff; it was a formula applied to millions of cases. And Scobie thought that people in similar circumstances would give the priest a verbal promise and extract from him the words of Absolution and go back and sin again; but he was a man of his word, he would not cheat himself or God however much he pretended before other people:

> "It would be no good my promising that, Father".
> "You must promise. You can't desire the end without desiring the means" (52).

So far the priest restricted himself to the essentials of confession. He did not query any of Scobie's answers, not even when Scobie denied the possibility of returning to see Helen. Father Rank, acting strictly within the limits of anonymity, takes it for granted that when a dangerous occasion of sin is unavoidable, steps must be taken to lessen the danger by making the occasion less "proximate", more "remote", in this case by seeing the woman in the company of others. That was the least the confessor could require of any penitent, that was the means essential to the end. But Scobie thought in different terms, in terms of peace for which the ravages of war are not essential. Therefore, seeing Scobie's, or rather "penitent X's", unwillingness to adopt the means necessary to avoid the sin in the future, Father Rank resorts to persuasion reminding him there is nothing automatic in the Sacraments and that forgiveness is effective only when there is real repentance, and

(52) Ibid. p.266.

repentance rests on one's acknowledgement of having done wrong. Scobie replied unhesitatingly:

"I do know that".

And therefore, he was told, he must have a "real purpose of amendment", to which the priest added a reflexion on the infinite Mercy of God which is thwarted not by man's sinning but by man's refusal to repent of having sinned. Through the grille Scobie could see Father Rank wiping the sweat out of his eyes in token of weariness, and assenting with his intellect to everything the priest said but unwilling to commit himself, he felt an urge to spare the priest further discomfort in the box and sought to bring the confession to a close:

"I think I was wrong to come, Father".

The confessor answered:

> "I don't want to refuse you absolution, but I think if you would just go away and turn things over in your mind, you'd came back in a better frame of mind" (53)

The conciseness of the first part of the dialogue responded aptly to Major Scobie's forthright external manner, whereas the warmth of the second part sought to touch the emotional adolescent in him and bring it in line with reason and the promptings of divine grace. Father Rank's procedure followed text-book directions, but these directions are steeped in wisdom which "reaching mightily from end to end, disposeth all things gently". He realized that there are moments in a man's life when he must

(53) Ibid. p.267.

hang on to principle by the skin of his teeth, when naked faith and trust devoid of all sentiment are the only way to salvation, but he also realized that Christ while uttering His "thou shalt not" also presented Himself as Salvation when He said: "Come to me all you that are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest". And therefore Father Rank, as described by Graham Greene, is not to be criticised for having failed Scobie in his hour of greatest need. Confession is not a psycho-analyst's couch nor is it a Procrustean bed; it is an encounter with Christ through the Church, with Christ who was firm and adamant in principle but gentle in approach. Consequently I cannot endorse the verdict of Fr. J.P. Murphy when he writes:

> By a tiny drop of compassion and a spark of priestly zeal, Father Rank... could have prevented the suicide of Scobie (54).

Major Scobie is quite a different sort of person from the young girl Rose - of Brighton Rock - who approaches the kind old priest not for absolution but for words of comfort, and therefore sentiment is not called for. Father Rank is not devoid of compassion and priestly zeal, witness his twenty-two years battling with climate and environment as trying as any in the world. Suicide was the last thing Father Rank, or any other priest to whom Scobie had not declared his inmost self, would have suspected.

And when we consider that Graham Greene creates his

(54) John P. Murphy, S.J. "The Potting Shed", Renascence (Vol. 12) p.44.

fictional characters in this and some of his other novels to convey to his readers a glimpse of God's infinite Mercy, we can well understand that suicide was integral to the plot of the story inasmuch as it provided a unique occasion to transmit the message.

In the three most significant works of Greene the leading character commits suicide, and in all three a priest makes an appearance as a messenger of hope. Pinkie, Scobie, and Rose are tragic on the surface, but hope has the last word. Brighton Rock and The Heart of the Matter are both set in a coastal town and deal with spiritual storm and stress which calm down in the final chapter at the voice of Christ speaking through a priest.

Father Rank makes a fourth appearance but does not speak personally to Scobie. He is depicted saying Mass and giving Holy Communion. Scobie follows the Mass with increasing unease and felt more and more a stranger. He tried to pray for God's mercy but the fear and shame of making a sacrilegious Communion chilled his brain. He felt a great urge to get up and leave before Communion. He saw his chance to follow the priest's advice and resolve to have done with Helen and return to Confession with real repentance, but he did not take the chance. He went up to the altar with thoughts of blasphemy assaulting his mind, and with his mouth open to receive the Sacred Host he said to himself:

> "O God, I offer up my damnation to you. Take it. Use it for them" (55).

(55) H.M., p.272.

In the next fifty pages Scobie is presented as a man confused and despairing. He plans his own suicide in such a way as to make his death appear either as an accident or the result of a heart condition. For the first time he makes false entries into his diary. He is promoted to Commissioner of Police, but he no longer cares. He continued to see Helen Rolt, but his sacrilegious Communion cast its shadow over all else.

5.

Father Rank's fifth intervention in The Heart of the Matter occupies the last two pages of the book. Scobie has committed suicide. The priest goes to speak with Mrs. Scobie. It is a kind of spiritual post-mortem on Major Scobie on the part of his widow, but on the priest's part it is an effort of resuscitation of Mrs. Scobie, from a spiritual angle.

Questioned as to whether the priest had any knowledge of suicidal tendencies in her husband, or of any premeditated plan to take his own life, he replied candidly and truthfully:

> "I should never have noticed it, Mrs. Scobie" (56).
> "Wilson did".
> "Somehow I can't like a man who's quite so observant".
> "It's his job".

This brief exchange shows Father Rank in his natural self, and thus symbolizes the general run of priests. He was not a man endowed, like some of the Saints, with preternatural powers of intuition and prophecy. He had to deal with Scobie within the limitations of Scobie's openness towards him both in the

(56) Ibid. p.332.

confessional and outside it. He was not a professional psychologist and did not claim to be. His relationships with others were based on a charity that thinks no evil and prefers to see their good qualities to prying into their weaknesses. He knew of Scobie's affairs with Helen and also realized that looseness in sexual matters can easily weaken and corrupt a person in many other ways, therefore he bent his energies to the task of trying to persuade Scobie to overcome his immediate temptation.

But Father Rank was not, as Louise was prompted to think, slow-witted. When she told him that Wilson was aware of Scobie's scheme he first brushed it aside, as much as to say: "I'm not a policeman and I don't like people on the prowl", yet at the same time the rumours he had heard about Louise and Wilson began to find confirmation, so very tactfully "he took a quick look at her" and, with a touch of irony, expressed surprise that an accountant like Wilson should make it his job to assess character and hidden motives as well as figures in a ledger. He thereby gave Louise to understand that she was letting sentiment and vanity get the better of her in her dealings with Wilson. But since she was not asking for spiritual guidance, he allowed her to change the subject.

> She said drearily: "Father, haven't you any comfort to give me?"

To which he replies:

> "You've been given an awful lot of comfort in your life, Mrs. Scobie. If what Wilson thinks is true, it's he who needs our comfort"

as though he were trying to take Mrs. Scobie out of her self-pity and get her to pray for her husband, whom she knew better than anyone else, or should have known after fifteen years of married life with him.

> "A priest only knows the unimportant things"
> "Unimportant"?
> "Oh, I mean the sins", he said impatiently. "A man doesn't come to us and confess his virtues" (57).

This was Father Rank's simple way of saying what Christian philosophy and theology have been saying in hundreds of volumes, viz: that good is the positive in man, evil is negative; that in a man of good will, virtue outstrips sin; that a man like Scobie had his redeeming qualities, but more than that, he had his Redeemer. Louise should have known and appreciated all this. She should be imploring God to forgive her for having been so unco-operative with her husband in matters pertaining to his peace of soul and to his spiritual growth. She, a cradle Catholic, could and should have been an inspiration to him, but she left him to grope in darkness. She presumed to pass judgement, and raised the topic of her husband and Mrs. Rolt:

> "I expect you know about Mrs. Rolt. Most people did".

Father Rank was on his guard, he did not wish to be drawn into a discussion about Scobie's relations with Helen; charity and the elementary prudence of a confessor forbade it. He merely

(57) Ibid. p333. Sin is not "unimportant" as a breach of love for God, but the sins mostly acknowledged and confessed are of less importance psychologically than a man's determined efforts to do some good in the world.

remarked:

"Poor woman"

which Louise rejected with:

"I don't see why".

She could not see why she should have anything but contempt for a woman who had come between herself and her husband, but Father Rank had other ideas which he expressed in a somewhat unusual manner:

> "I'm sorry for anyone happy and ignorant who gets mixed up in that way with one of us" (58).

What did he mean? He meant that although adultery is objectively a serious moral disorder that carries within itself its own ravages and punishment, lack of knowledge and awareness of its sinfulness can preserve it from robbing one of subjective integrity; but when committed with someone like Scobie, who at least intellectually is convinced of the truth of Christ and of the Christian Law as upheld by the Catholic Church, the bad conscience of the Catholic somehow rubs off on the non-Christian, casts a shadow of doubt, and opens up prospects of guilt for both of them. Louise got the gist of the priest's inference and said with bitterness:

"He was a bad Catholic"

which was countered by a remark indicating impatience with shallow and smug self-complacency resorting to rash judgement:

"That's the silliest phrase in common use",

(58) Ibid. p.333.

a remark closely parallel to the gentle Father Browne's "We aren't as stupid as you think" to an unbeliever after another suicide who really thought the Church sat in judgement on the departed (59).

Louise was not to be put off:

> "And at the end this - horror. He must have known that he was damning himself"

Father Rank assented, provisionally:

> "Yes, he knew that all right. He never had any trust in mercy - except for other people".

Louise took this as an endorsement of her own idea: that her husband had put himself beyond the pale of God's mercy and the Church's power of intercession. He had broken all the rules, it seemed, and so she replied:

> "It's no good even praying"...

This conclusion made Father Rank furious. He "clapped the cover of the diary to" - like slamming a door on a secret room - and said:

> "For goodness' sake, Mrs. Scobie, don't imagine you - of I - know a thing about God's mercy" (60)

and, in answer to her legalistic approach: "The Church says..." he uttered a profound statement that will shock only those who fail to appreciate the implications of Christ's "Judge not, that you may not be judged":

(59) The Living Room, ed. cit. p.69.
(60) H.M., p.333.

> "I know the Church says. The Church knows all the rules. But it doesn't know what goes on in a single human heart" (61).

When The Heart of the Matter was first published many Catholics, clerical and lay, took exception to this development of the story. They could not understand how a priest could continue to count as a member of the Church one who had taken his own life with apparent deliberation and in full use of his faculties. The Code of Canon Law deprives of ecclesiastical burial anyone who knowingly and willingly commits suicide and has not given signs of repentance before death ensued (62), yet here was Father Rank riding roughshod over the Church's legislation (63). But the problem uppermost in the priest's mind was not external observance of rules destined to deter from violating the divine and natural Law and to strengthen the bonds of visible unity within the Church, it was Scobie's conscience, and that was a secret between Scobie and his Maker. The Church lays down certain principles governing objective morality but is powerless to pass judgement on more than external signs of interior dispositions; this judgement she leaves open to the higher Court of God's Justice and Mercy. The Vatican Council II has stressed this inability of the Church to

(61) Ibid. p.333. The whisky priest and Father Browne use almost the same words, the former: "I don't know a thing about the mercy of God" (P.G., ed.cit.p.259), and the latter: "And you don't know and I don't know the amount of love and pity He's spending on her now" (The Living Room, ed.cit.p.69).

(62) Canon 1240: Ecclesiastica sepultura privantur, nisi ante mortem aliqua dederint poenitentiae signa:...3. Qui se ipsi occiderint deliberato consilio.

(63) Greene does not mention the funeral of Scobie, but Father Rank would have interpreted the "deliberato consilio" of Canon Law as not applying to Scobie in his confused state of mind.

judge the depths of a man's conscience thanks to the growing awareness within the Church of the gap often existing between objective and subjective morality, however much she may strive to foster "informed" consciences where objective and subjective are in harmony.

Louise was a little frightened and surprised at Father Rank's outburst, and asked him wearily:

"You think there's some hope then?"

but received once again the rough edge of the priest's tongue:

"Are you so bitter against him?"

to which she lamely replied:

"I haven't any bitterness left"

only to get another rebuff:

"And do you think God's likely to be more bitter than a woman?" he said with harsh insistence,

that made her wince but did not open her heart to the mystery of a Merciful God adumbrated in those words of the Old Testament that speak of God's motherly tenderness towards Israel and given triumphant expression in the whole tenor of life of Christ the Son of God. Louise's mind moved on a lower level:

"Oh, why, why, did he have to make such a mess of things?" (64).

She was still absorbed in appearances, so the priest went straight to "the heart of the matter"

"It may seem an odd thing to say - when a man's as wrong as he was - but I think, from what I saw of him, that he really loved God".

(64) H.M., p.334.

Louise's bitterness was not entirely drained away, and she replied:

"He certainly loved no one else".

Father Rank did not contest her assertion, he merely left the door ajar:

"And you may be in the right of it there, too".

THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHRISTIAN HOPE

Leaving aside the unfathomable ways of God's Mercy and the Mystery of Predestination, let us see on what grounds Father Rank based his conviction that Scobie did not depart this life without the grace of God. Confining ourselves to Scobie's last moments, we have Greene's description charged with the richest symbolism:

> Somewhere far away he thought he heard the sounds of pain. "A storm", he said aloud, "there's going to be a storm", as the clouds grew, and he tried to get to close the windows. "Ali", he called, "Ali". It seemed to him as though someone outside the room were seeking him, calling him, and he made a last effort to indicate that he was there. He got to his feet and heard the hammer of his heart beating out a reply. He had a message to convey, but the darkness and the storm drove it back within the case of his breast, and all the time outside the house, outside the world that drummed like hammer blows within his ear, someone wandered, seeking to get in, someone appealing for help, someone in need of him. And automatically at the call of need, at the cry of a victim, Scobie strung himself to act. He dredged his consciousness up from an infinite distance in order to make some reply. He said aloud, "Dear God, I love..." but the effort was too great and he did not feel his body when it struck the floor..." (65).

It is evident that Scobie responds to the invitation of

(65) Ibid. pp. 325-326.

divine grace in the only way he knows how: acting upon his deeply-embedded sense of pity that, for all its ravages, places him on the threshold of real theological charity. Now the tables are turned. The Enemy had made use of Scobie's ill-regulated compassion, but God takes it in hand for his salvation. Pity for others in distress is a redeeming feature in every soul, it is the "going forth" into exile from the land of one's selfishness, and although it may pass through barren wastes and lead to spiritual conflict, it is an Exodus that is crowned by the possession of the Promised Land. The "Passover Mystery" is re-enacted in this openness of heart to the needs of others, it is the way of salvation as disclosed by Divine Revelation and underlined by Christ's own words and mortal life, death, and resurrection to immortality. Moreover, the "Hound of Heaven" was in hot pursuit even when Scobie "fled Him down the nights and down the days... and down the labyrinthine ways" of his own mind. And now the Voice was bursting round him like the sea. He heard a call in distress, he made a mighty effort to reply, and said aloud: "Dear God, I love..." but failed to complete the sentence. One thing however is certain: in Scobie's mind "love" and "God" were bracketed together, not divorced. As for the rest, we are left in suspense... the Mystery belongs to God, but all the pointers are there indicating salvation.

When this novel appeared grave doubts were cast on the

orthodoxy of Father Rank as presented by Greene. Evelyn Waugh comments:

> "Where is Scobie? In Hell, of course" (66),

and linking Pinkie and Scobie, he writes:

> Both believe in damnation and believe themselves damned. Both die in mortal sin as defined by moral theologians (67).

Quod gratis asseritur, gratis negatur. Waugh's assertion is gratuitous and rash. Few genuine theologians, especially after Vatican II's insistence on respect for the individual conscience, would endorse them. None would deny that suicide, in se, is a serious mortal sin, but none would affirm that God's grace could not reach either Pinkie or Scobie even on the brink of death, or that they had positively rejected that grace. And Greene is right when he says:

> The Church does not demand that we believe any soul is cut off from Mercy (68)

thus anticipating the solemn warning of the Council:

> God alone is the Judge and the Searcher of hearts; for that reason He forbids us to make judgement about the internal guilt of anyone (69)

Graham Greene's priests register a protest against undue emphasis on objective morality at the expense of subjective

(66) Caroline Gordon, "Some Readings and Misreadings", The Sweanee Review, vol. 61 (Summer 1953), pp. 395-396.
(67) Evelyn Waugh, "Felix Culpa", The Commonweal, vol. 48 (April-October, 1948), p.324.
(68) Brighton Rock, ed. cit. pp.331-332.
(69) The Documents of Vatican II, op. cit. p.227.

conscience, and thus Greene himself has done a signal service to the theology of the Church with his presentation of cases of conscience that provoked lively discussion throughout the world, which has led to a more balanced appraisal of the issues involved in moral problems.

Canon Joseph Cartmell seems to side with Evelyn Waugh in condemning Scobie:

> Fr. Rank, to console the widow, expressed his opinion that Scobie really loved God. He could hardly mean it in the literal sense, unless he was assuming that Scobie's sins were indeliberate, the voluntary acts of a warped mind - an assumption which is against the whole tenor of the book. Scobie is a deliberate sinner up to and including the taking of the poison (70).

I am not convinced that Canon Cartmell has seized the point made by Greene with regard to Scobie. Father Rank was not just pouring balm on a wound and saying the comforting word, he was in dead earnest; in fact he was "furiously" sincere and convinced of what he said. And what he said was in essence that we should not condemn and that God's Mercy knows no limits. But he also was aware of serious limitations to Scobie's sense of responsibility however much the latter invoked it. He knew that there was a flaw in Scobie's psychological make-up and in his theological understanding.

1.

Time and time again Scobie does indeed avow his guilt and his deserving of condemnation - which he has the temerity to

(70) Canon Joseph Cartmell, "A Comment upon "Felix Culpa" by Evelyn Waugh", The Commonweal, vol. 48 (April-October 1948) p.325.

offer up to God for the salvation of others - but there is a passage worth quoting in full that shows how very confused he is.

> He said, O God, I am the only guilty one because I've known the answers all the time. I've preferred to give You pain rather than give pain to Helen or my wife because I can't observe Your suffering. I can only imagine it. But there are limits to what I can do to You - or them. I can't desert either of them while I'm alive, but I can die and remove myself from their blood stream. They are ill with me and I can cure them. And You too God - You are ill with me. I can't go on, month after month, insulting You. I can't face coming up to the altar at Christmas - Your birthday feast - and taking Your body and blood for the sake of a lie. I can't do that. You'll be better off if You lose me once and for all. I know what I'm doing. I'm not pleading for mercy. I am going to damn myself, whatever that means. I've longed for peace and I'm never going to know peace again. But You'll be at peace when I am out of Your reach (71).

Without commenting upon this passage word for word, it is immediately obvious that the soliloquist is mentally ill. There are so many contradictions expressed that no normal person could have voiced them in his waking hours (72). True enough, he

(71) H.M., p.315.

(72) When I say that Scobie is mentally ill I do not mean that Scobie is not capable of behaving responsibly. I simply mean that the contradictions in this character cannot be understood without making allowance for some psychological disturbance. Even in the most normal people one finds an ontological split which makes it difficult to assess his moral responsibility:

> "There exists in man, as he is now, an ontological split, which shows up also in his activity, especially in that activity which endeavours to be most total; namely, moral-religious activity. Not only wrong or sinful activity but our whole moral and religious activity manifest this dichotomy and its tensions". Piet Schoonenberg, Man and Sin (London: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p.30. (Continued on next page).

cannot see how God can be "offended" and suffer because of sin, he can only let his imagination rove wildly round the question; but, even referring to the Passion of Christ, how can he wish to spare God suffering and at the same time mock God by taking his own life? He is eternally in quest of peace, and yet is ready to forfeit all peace. He prays to God and yet gives preference to creatures in their suffering ... Each new sin conjures up a new prayer, a new lack of peace, a fresh bout of despondency. This could be interpreted as the impulses of divine grace moving Scobie to repent, but I prefer to view the situation as a psychopathic one in which obsession is translated into religious terminology, as so frequently happens with patients who "practise" religion. A psychologically healthy Christian, however

(72) cont'd. To admit the existence of some psychological disturbance in Scobie, is not to detract from this character but rather to enhance him, since he becomes the symbol of so many millions of human beings whose moral responsibility is very difficult to judge. It seems to me that Graham Greene himself favours this interpretation when he writes in his introduction to <u>The Heart of the Matter</u>:

> "This book cannot pretend to be art because the compiler has left in all the contradictions: its only purpose is to present as truthfully as possible an enigma, though I daresay it is an enigma common to most of us if every man had his own case-book". Graham Greene, <u>The Heart of the Matter</u> (London: The Collected Edition, Heinemann and Bodley Head 1971), p.viii.

And elsewhere he adds:

> "The scales to me seem too heavily weighted, the plot overloaded, the religious scruples of Scobie too extreme... Perhaps Scobie should have been a subject for cruel comedy rather than for tragedy...". ~~Ibid., pp. xiii and xv.~~ Graham Greene, <u>The Heart of the Matter</u> (London: The Collected Edition, Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1971), pp xiii and xv.

great a sinner, does not feel the Presence of God as a dead weight on his soul, as Scobie does. Moreover, his remorseless sense of pity was destroying his sense of proportion:

> He knew from experience how passion died away and how love went, but pity always stayed (73).

He was intelligent enough to know that "no cause was important enough" to call for suicide (74), but now he offers to God his own condemnation, the consequence of taking his own life.

Father Rank did not observe suicidal tendencies in Scobie, but Greene drops a number of hints indicative of this possibility: even in dreams he looks for "a weapon or a rope" to kill himself (75); and thinking of what he "was going to do, he thought with love, even God is a failure" (76) - symptoms of a diseased mind which were never conveyed to the priest.

The physical environment of Freetown with its enervating climate is not conducive to clear thinking, and the moral corruption of Scobie's milieu gnawed the very vitals of a sensitive man like him. And if we add the continual nagging and self-pity of his wife Louise, the death of their only child, his falling into the clutches of the Syrian merchant, we have a number of factors conspiring to make life almost unbearable to Scobie and aggravating the self-inflicted wounds of his exaggerated sense of compassion. We have a whole range of

(73) H.M., p.211.
(74) Ibid. p.272.
(75) Ibid. p.106.
(76) Ibid. p.309.

factors diminishing Scobie's moral imputability to the extent at least of making him less than fully culpable of acts that by their nature are grievously wrong.

Charles Moëller writes the following:

> Ces faits permettent une conclusion à mes yeux aussi importante que la précédente: si, objectivement, Scobie n'est plus un chrétien, subjectivement sa culpabilité consciente apparaît très mince: elle n'est totale qu'a un niveau de son être ou Dieu seul peut lire, et dont le malheureux semble n'avoir pas conscience. En d'autres mots, le désespoir de Scobie n'est pas un de ses actes qui apparaissent brusquement dans une conscience, et qui engagent d'un coup toute la responsabilité; ce péché est tissé, depuis son enfance lointaine, dans la trame même de son être subconscient et inconscient. Ce point de vue ne diminue pas la responsabilité objective de chacun des péchés que narre le roman; mais il en diminue la culpabilité subjective.
>
> Seul un coup de tonnerre, un éclair de l'esprit divin, pourrait dissoudre et recompenser la substance de cet être et lui donner l'occasion d'un ultime acte d'amour, qui le sauverait (77).

The same author concludes his reflexions on Scobie's responsibility for his acts with the following:

> Tout ce qui précède indique qu'en saine théologie, et sans préjuger le verdict divin, il faut dire que Scobie est sauvé... La grâce ainsi entrevue apporte avec elle sa propre lumière, l'amour. Scobie est la réponse chrétienne à cette caricature qu'était le Père Panelouse. Le chef de la police, si haute de "la peste" qu'il désespère, mais si tenacement poursuivi par Dieu, sauvé par l'amour, incarne une doctrine de la grâce qui est si belle qu'aucun homme n'a pu l'inventer (78).

2.

If on the negative side one may conclude that Scobie, with

(77) Charles Moëller, Litérature du XXe siècle et le christianisme (Paris: Casterman, 1954), vol. 1. pp.292-293.
(78) Ibid. pp.297-298.

all his faults and failings, did not possess the full knowledge and give the full consent required for complete culpability, on the positive side I think we may agree with Father Rank's verdict that "he really loved God". This does not cancel out the possibility that on occasions he may have committed grievous sin, but that he was not in love with evil as he understood it.

There are several passages in the story which indicate that Scobie did love God and his neighbour, however disguised his attitude beneath the complexities of his psychological condition.

> Scobie's unusually acute sensitivity to the huge misery of the world is combined with a sense of responsibility towards it and an immense longing for peace (79).

And yet when he sees before him a six-year-old girl rescued from shipwreck and at death's door he is ready to forgo the achievement he coveted most in the world if only God would spare her life:

> "Father", he prayed, "give her peace. Take away my peace for ever, but give her peace" (80).

Such an offering surpasses mere human compassion; it has all the marks of supernatural charity. Greene himself, in a letter to Moré, quoted by B. Mesnet, makes the following observation concerning the above episode:

(79) Béatrice Mesnet, Graham Greene and The Heart of the Matter, ed. cit. pp. 63-64.

(80) H.M., p.143.

> Obviously one did have in mind that when he offered up his peace for the child it was genuine prayer and had the results that followed. I always believe that such prayers, though obviously a God would not fulfil them to the limit of robbing him of a peace for ever, are answered up to a point as a kind of test of a man's sincerity and to see whether in fact the offer was one merely based on emotion (81).

This prayer inevitably recalls that of Father William Callifer in The Potting Shed:

> "Let him live, God. I love him... Take away my faith, but let him live" (82).

The prayer was answered, and its acceptance sheds light on the rest of the priest's life. May we not interpret Scobie's ensuing plight as an answer to his prayer for the dying girl? Be that as it may, his prayer was a real act of love prompted by the grace of God, because "he who loves his brother abides in the light" (I John 2:10).

Not long before committing suicide we have an instance of another heartfelt prayer:

> "O God", he prayed, his hands dripping over the wheel, " kill me now, now. My God, you'll never have more complete contrition... What a mess I am... kill me... kill me. Now. Now. Now. Before I hurt you again" (83).

Granted that Scobie was mentally ill, it is difficult to deny that the essentials of goodness were there.

My deduction therefore is that when Father Rank tells Louise that Scobie "really loved God", he is not merely trying

(81) B. Mesnet, op. cit. p.102.
(82) The Potting Shed, ed. cit. p.138.
(83) H.M., p.307.

to comfort her; he has solid reasons for his assertion. We could apply to Scobie the words referring to Othello:

he loved not wisely but too well.

3.

The very ordinariness of Father Rank in his personal qualities and in his dealing with a crisis in exceptional circumstances has the function of giving unity and point to The Heart of the Matter inasmuch as he symbolizes the mission of the Church among men in the power of Christ, the Man, the primordial Sacrament of Redemption.

In some respects Father Rank is more true to life than the whisky priest, Father Browne, and Father Callifer, Martyrdom is not, in its restricted sense, the common lot of priests, nor is Father Browne's perfect equilibrium, fruit of thirty years of spiritual aridity; and even the anonymous priest of Brighton Rock is presented with an aureole of sanctity that sets him apart. All these priests are real, not fictitious caricatures, but are less representative of the Catholic priesthood than Father Rank.

Like most other priests depicted by Graham Greene, Father Rank is zealous and humble, ready to admit failure but strenuous in his efforts to succeed where the good of souls is at stake, not endowed with the gift of superior discernment but moderately intelligent, not a practiser of fearsome austerities but a man who welcomes yet does not fuss over

his little creature comforts. His great contribution is as spokesman of the Church in the Church's abiding trust in the Mercy of God for all men no matter how low they have fallen, but on one condition, that they recognize their unworthiness and look beyond themselves and beyond anything this world can give for their ultimate redemption. Scobie was not saved from the madness of suicide, but Father Rank was not to blame, he was given no clear indication of Scobie's project, although he gave him plenty of opportunity to disclose his mind and heart and co-operate with the grace of God. In this too Father Rank aptly symbolizes the Church's efforts to win the confidence of men and mediate in Christ for their salvation, but if they refuse to accept the Church's offer the world will follow its inborn suicidal tendencies physically and spiritually.

The role of Father Rank is integral to the plot and underlying significance of The Heart of the Matter. His interventions are few and brief, but without them the novel would present the real conflict of Scobie only in a vague humanistic light and not in the fierce light of eternal verities. The priest is there to clarify the problem, as much as the priest intervenes in Brighton Rock to show that evil does not triumph in the end, as much as Fr. Browne is part and parcel of The Living Room to turn the room from a charnel-house of the spirit to a window on the world of divine love.

> Father Rank cannot be dismissed as the mere plot contrivance... Father Rank must attempt to restore the norm of the Church; its doctrines

must be presented as flexible enough to accommodate heroic action: the Church may know all the rules but not what goes on in a human heart. Scobie may have killed himself, but he may have repented in the moment before death. Father Rank's presence is indispensable to the plan of the novel, for Greene's dramatic technique in the construction of the plot demands, as has been noted, that someone restore balance and order in the world after the passions of men have spent themselves (84).

Without Father Rank's intervention The Heart of the Matter would be a work of bitterness and absolute frustration, and would symbolize a world bereft of purpose and hope; and then it would be a Sartre or a Camus writing, not Graham Greene.

(84) A.A. De Vitis, op. cit. p.103.

FATHER CLAY

The only other priest described by Greene in The Heart of the Matter is Father Clay to whom the author devotes only about three pages but sufficient to show Greene's dislike for a certain type of cleric and as a contrast to Father Rank.

Father Clay is portrayed as a misfit in the modern world and in the foreign missions, a person lacking the qualities of breadth of outlook, human warmth, kindly tolerance, humility, charity, and adaptability at the service of Christ the hope of the world, qualities that Greene considers essential to the priesthood and to the Church at large, if the work of redemption is to be effectively carried on. There is just one other priest for whom Greene has little esteem: Fr. Thomas in A Burnt-Out Case, but even he does not meet with the same savage reproaches as Father Clay. The latter is obsessed by what he calls God's Justice, fear is the mainspring of his approach, whereas Greene is the apostle of divine Mercy and of hope. These two uncongenial priests offset the others, and the resulting chiaroscuro helps us to appreciate Greene's idea of what a priest should be.

In The Heart of the Matter there are two suicides. In the early pages a young police officer by the name of Pemberton is put in charge of a distant out-station, Bamba, where he is the only white man apart from the Catholic missioner, Father Clay. Scobie hears of Pemberton's tragic death and on the way

to the station calls on the priest. He does so with considerable reluctance because he had known Father Clay before and had come to dislike him. Greene presents Father Clay with the words

> A hurricane-lamp shone on the priest's short red hair and his young freckled Liverpool face (85)

and proceeds to describe him as little more than a boy, without experience, a short time on the missions, with a narrow outlook and a mind cluttered up with tags and formulas of theology picked up in the seminary but never assimilated or integrated with real life. The house he lived in was a

> dismal little European house which had been built among the mud huts in laterite to look like a Victorian presbytery,

a fitting symbol of his personality and ineffectiveness - which again symbolizes for Greene a type of "spirituality" and atmosphere all too common in a pre-conciliar Church that had so often failed to rise to the challenge of the modern world.

Father Clay is a "dismal" sort of person whose "red and sleepless eyes" betray nervousness, anxiety, and disappointment. He cannot "sit still for more than a few minutes at a time" and spends his days almost in solitary confinement "pacing his tiny room up and down, up and down", away from the wicked world, and busy with his private devotions prompted by a "plaster statue" and a "hideous oleograph". He had only "fifteen converts" in the mission and for them he said Mass and ministered to their spiritual wants and comforts. Quite a contrast to Father Rank.

(85) H.M., p.94.

> "You know, Major Scobie, for weeks and months nothing happens here at all. I just walk up and and down here, up and down" (86).

Father Clay is not only lacking in missionary zeal, he lacks even common courtesy. He has to be asked by Scobie for a glass of water on arriving after a tiring trek. He seldom spoke with Pemberton and treated him distantly because he was not a Catholic. Although, as he confessed to Scobie, he was "quite unsuited to loneliness", and yet he had scruples about taking a drink or playing a game of cards - except "Demon" - and made no effort to be sociable. Had he accepted Pemberton's hand of friendship when it was offered him he could most likely have deterred the young officer from suicide.

After all allowances have been made for the climate, the priest's youth and his hot-house formation at the seminary, we are still repelled by his priggishness and self-complacency. He declines Pemberton's loan of books to read:

> "they aren't at all the kind of books I care to read - love stories, novels... (87)

which include the writings of Somerset Maugham and Edgar Wallace, and confines his attention to his breviary and a few devotional tracts. He was a man without resources and yet prided himself on his unworldliness. His only "hope" was that Pemberton might have been murdered and that the murderer would have time to repent. "Terrible","terrible" is the word that he used most often in connection with the suicide.

(86) Ibid. p.95.
(87) Ibid. p.96.

Scobie leaves the gloom-infested room of Father Clay and walks into broad daylight. Greene has a happy phrase with which to convey through nature the liberating theme of redemption unashamedly hopeful when rightly understood:

> It was day now outside, and there was a peculiar innocence about the light, gentle and clear and fresh before the sun climbs (88).

Just the opposite to Father Clay's harsh, abstruse, and stale theology. Almost an analogue of the witless Pemberton who knew not what he was doing when he took his own life:

> When Scobie turned the sheet down to the shoulders he had the impression that he was looking at a child in a nightshirt quietly asleep: the pimples were the pimples of puberty and the dead face seemed to bear the trace of no experience beyond the class-room or the football field (89).

Thus two "innocents", Father Clay and Pemberton, confronted Scobie: the one incapable of seeing beyond abstract principles, the other incapable of more than juvenile impulse; and Scobie reflecting

> that unquestionably there must be mercy for someone so unformed (90).

And the letter Pemberton had written to his father just before killing himself:

> "Dear Dad - Forgive all this trouble. There doesn't seem anything else to do.... It's a rotten business for you, but it can't be helped... Your loving son (91).

No wonder Scobie stood his ground when Father Clay repeated

(88) Ibid. p.96.
(89) Ibid. p.97.
(90) Ibid. p.98.
(91) Ibid. pp. 98-99.

parrot-fashion: "The Church's teaching...":

> "You're not going to tell me there's anything unforgivable there, Father... We'd be damned all right because we know, but <u>he</u> doesn't know a thing" (92)...
>
> "Even the Church can't teach me that God doesn't pity the young..." (93).

I have dealt with Greene's portrayal of Father Clay here, not because it is unimportant or superfluous to the story, but because this priest and the theology he voices are the exception rather than the rule as exemplified in Father Rank. They are the dark side of the Church which, like the moon, is given to the world to reflect God's love for man in Christ. They personify a human tendency towards "melancholia" and represent a kind of trough in the changing mentality of the human character of the Church which is all the time in need of redemption. Paganism thrives on fear and doom, Christianity thrives on hope and light. There is in all of us an admixture of the pagan and the christian. Greene is a Christian writing to speak the Christian message of hope and light in parables to a world, and even a Church, that has allowed a pagan front to advance. Two priests have to deal with a suicide; two theologies have to deal with forces of evil making for destruction; and one sees the world wounded and despoiled and lying in a ditch, and passes by; the other crosses over the road to commiserate and give practical help - which may yet be refused, but which must be tendered.

(92) Ibid. p.99.

(93) Ibid. p.99.

2. THE END OF THE AFFAIR

Three years after The Heart of the Matter, in 1951, there appeared another novel by Graham Greene entitled "The End of the Affair (94) where the author embarked on a new technique of flash-back, narrator, letter, diary, and in particular of religious controversy, which in this work is an essential ingredient and identified with the main plot. The sin of adultery links the story with The Living Room, The Complaisant Lover, and The Comedians, but in other respects this novel is unlike the rest of Greene's writings. All this recalls Mauriac's "La fin de la nuit".

The setting is London during the Second World War: a scene of wretchedness, compassion, and suffering against a background of falling bombs, crumbling or dilapidated houses, the Golders Green crematorium, public office, prying and detection. We are presented with human passion in the raw, with self-deception and self-giving, with love-hate complexes, with agnosticism versus belief in the supernatural. It all gives Greene splendid scope to bring out the immensity of God's Mercy and the possibilities of hope for men.

Maurice Bendrix, a professional writer, is anxious to write a novel whose leading character is a senior civil servant, so he strikes up an acquaintanceship with a certain Henry Miles, a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Pensions (later changed to Ministry of Home Security during the war). Bendrix invites Miles' wife, Sarah, to a meal in a restaurant one evening, and

(94) Graham Greene, E.A., (Heinemann Ltd. London, 1960).

immediately there springs up between them an intimate relationship. Sarah falls desperately in love with Bendrix, Bendrix is consumed with sexual passion for Sarah. But one day, after two years of secret complicity in adultery, Sarah breaks off her relationship with Bendrix, who suspects another lover supplanting him. Sarah's husband is informed of Bendrix's suspicions and both collaborate to employ a spy Parkis to discover the suspected culprit, Miles being unaware of Bendrix's previous liaison with Sarah. It is not until Sarah's diary is read that the unknown "lover" is seen to be no other than God Himself. One day a bomb fell near the house while Sarah and Bendrix were making love. Bendrix was half buried in debris and thought by Sarah to be dead. She promptly went on her knees and prayed to God--in Whom she did not then really believe - and made a vow that if Bendrix came out alive she would have no more adulterous dealings with him. In fact, Bendrix was shielded by a door that the blast had blown in, and shortly afterwards emerged unscathed.

Sarah is scrupulous about her vow, tries to wriggle out of it, but gradually becomes convinced of the reality of God's existence and God's love. The entries in her diary, read fully only after her natural death by both Miles and Bendrix, revealed an amazing conversion and swift progress towards the heights of sanctity. Her death was followed by no less amazing "coincidences", or what a Christian believer could call "miracles".

The dramatic conflict in the story is essentially a

a religious one where God intervenes in daily life even at its most sordid, where the grace of God stands like a beggar knocking at the door of a human heart that thirsted for love and eventually found it in Him. Pity for the sufferings of others is the hidden resort which God uses to awaken a soul to faith and trust in His Mercy, unlike Scobie who also had pity but failed to trust God. Sarah was a woman of great humility, unlike the proud Scobie, and this humility gave the seed of grace a chance to develop. Her human love for Bendrix, with all its generous self-surrender, in spite of her being married to Miles, is the fulcrum that God uses to raise her up to Himself.

Although it is not easy to draw a sharp line of distinction between Greene's writings -

> They are all part of a piece, and throughout them all, in some form or other, runs the theme - pursuit (95)

the flight-pursuit theme underlies this novel exclusively. On a spiritual level Sarah tries to flee both from God and from her husband, and Bendrix is also in flight from God and from himself. Religious theme and plot are here identified, and therefore we may consider <u>The End of the Affair</u> as Greene's most "Catholic" novel.

1.

Greene thinks that "the greatest Saints have been men

(95) Neville Braybrooke, "Graham Greene and the Double Man", <u>Dublin Review</u>, vol. 226 (1952), p.61.

with more than a normal capacity for evil", men have lively passions which reason and the grace of God have channelled into feats of great love for God and man. Human passions in themselves are two-edged swords that can cut both ways, into good or evil, into holiness or moral depravity. Greene's phrase recalls Saints like Augustine and Mary Magdalen. When we hear Sarah say:

> "Dear God, you know I want to want your pain, but I don't want it now. Take it away for a while and give it me another time" (96)

we are reminded of Augustine's cry before his conversion: "O God, give me continence, but not yet". But Sarah <u>prayed</u>. She prayed humbly and wholeheartedly to be able to believe. She confessed her own nothingness and sinfulness, she could only hope for the gift of faith from God. Above all, at first, she thought only of saving Bendrix's life, but to obtain this she strikes a "bargain" with God: if he comes out alive she will have no further adulterous dealings with him. Her prayer was heard; not only is Bendrix alive, but the grace of baptism she received as a young child in France - of which she is unaware - suddenly begins tosprout and take root in her conscience and emotions. And when God had become Real to her and her Supreme Lover, her love for Bendrix, purified of lust, became all the deeper:

> "Did I ever love Maurice as much before I loved You? Or was it really You I loved all the time? Did I touch You when I touched him? Could I have touched

(96) Graham Greene, <u>E.A.</u>,ed. cit. p. 106.

> You if I hadn't touched him first, touched him as I never touched Henry, anybody?..." (97).

We have here a profound insight into the workings, often unexpected, of divine grace; we have God, the Great Artist, who can turn even a serious blot into a part of his Great Design of Mercy, a strident discord into a feature of universal Harmony (98).

In conversation with Ronald Matthews, Graham Greene wisely points out the distinction between the essence of human love and the direction it is given (99). And in conversation with Maurice Bendrix, Sarah never uses his name, she addresses him simply as "you", to convey the idea of Sarah's unconscious quest for God who is Love, her identifying falsely, the human and the divine.

It is not without a struggle that Sarah wandered through the desert on her way to the Promised Land:

> I can catch a train home tomorrow and ring him up on the telephone. Henry will still be in the country perhaps, and we can spend the night together (100).

She offers to suffer, but ... not yet. She wants to believe, but feels she doesn't - like Father Callifer of The Potting Shed, like so many great Saints in the noche oscura of their mystic trials. But a time comes when the dawn breaks, when the winter is over and the spring bursts over the land, when the Promised Land is seen from a distance:

(97) Ibid. pp. 147-148.
(98) Even Bendrix's hate and jealousy contribute to Sarah's conversion. Cfr. ibid.
(99) "Si je vous comprends bien, ce n'est pas l'essence, mais l'orientation de l'amour de Sarah pour Bendrix qui est péché". - "Et c'est précisément son amour pour Bendrix qui la conduit à son amour de Dieu", dit Graham (Ronald Matthews, op. cit. 255-256).
(100) E.A., ed. cit. p.110.

When I ask You for pain, You give me peace.

But Sarah does not remain enclosed in herself - the whole experience has been a venturing forth, an exodus - and she wants others to benefit:

Give him my peace - he needs it more (101).

Faith is a little guiding light through darkness, but that little pool of light dissipates fear and uncertainty:

> I believe there's a God - I believe the whole bag of tricks, there's nothing I don't believe. They could subdivide the Trinity into a dozen parts and I'd believe. They could dig up records that proved Christ had been invented by Pilate to get himself promoted, and I'd believe just the same. I've caught belief like a disease (102). I've fallen into belief like I fell in love. I've never loved before as I love you, and I've never believed in anything before as I believe now. I'm sure. I've never been sure before about anything.... I fought belief for longer than I fought love, but I haven't any fight left (103).

When referring to the "dark night of the soul" of Father Callifer, in The Potting Shed, I quoted some significant texts from St. John of the Cross to show how some people are called to holiness by way of very severe trials that rob them of all sensitive pleasure and plunge them into intellectual stagnation and induce a sort of impotence of the active will, to the extent of bringing them to the brink of despair. Graham Greene depicts Father Callifer as an assiduous reader of the mystical works of St. John of the Cross, and now in Sarah's diary he shows himself

(101) Ibid. p.178.
(102) Compare with Pinkie's: "Perhaps when they christened me the holy water didn't take" (Brighton Rock, ed. cit. p.169).
(103) E.A., p.178.

aware of those same ideas which he translates into a symbolism drawn from human love:

> Two days ago I had such a sense of peace and quiet and love. Life was going to be happy again, but last night I dreamed I was walking up a long staircase to meet Maurice at the top. I was still happy because when I reached the top of the staircase we were going to make love. I called to him that I was coming, but it wasn't Maurice's voice that answered; it was a stranger's that boomed like a fog-horn warning lost ships, and scared me. I thought, he's let his flat and gone away and I don't know where he is, and going down the stairs again the water rose beyond my waist and the hall was thick with mist (104).

Sarah wakes up from the dream and struggles against the warning; she wants to go back to her old ways, but ... only for a time; later on she will break with everything but God. But gradually the "mist" clears and she begins to see Love in its real self.

The End of the Affair closes with a series of extraordinary happenings after Sarah's death. Greene describes them as miraculous interventions by Sarah herself now taken to heaven

(104) Ibid. p.148. This struggle between hope and despair, the soul and the devil, is also linked by T.S. Eliot with the image of a stair:

> At the first turning of the second stair
> I turned and saw below
> The same shape twisted on the banister
> Under the vapour in the fetid air
> Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
> The deceitful face of hope and of despair.
> (T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays, "Ash-Wednesday" - London: Faber and Faber, 1969 - p.93.

Compare with St. John of the Cross:

> Dark, dark, secure,
> By a secret stairway, in disguise... (En una noche oscura, second stanza)

who is writing, of course, of innocent souls rising to contemplation, but the "darkness" and the "security" - the "banister" - signify the interplay of despair and hope.

and interceding for those she loved, and still loves, on earth. These miracles are all part of Greene's message in the story, viz. that it is possible to ascend the heights of holiness from the depths of sinfulness if only there is love and a welcome to God's transforming and elevating grace, and that sometimes God shows us on earth by miracles that this possibility becomes a fact. He argues that Sarah became a Saint. And since Greene is constantly writing in parables, he wishes to convey the idea that the Catholic Church is both the "refuge of sinners" and the "home of Saints", and that miracles happen as truly in war-devastated London of the twentieth century as they did in Palestine during the life of Jesus Christ and of the early Church.

By telling us that Sarah was baptized in the Catholic Church in France when she was two years old but was unaware of it, Greene confirms the experience of many priests who meet people powerfully drawn by divine grace towards conversion and only afterwards discovering they had been baptized in early childhood, thanks perhaps to a grand-parent who is now interceding for them from heaven. The doctrine of the "ex opere operato" effect of the Sacraments is implied both here and in <u>The Power and the Glory</u> where Father José refers to the "ineffaceable seal" of his priestly ordination.

2.

In the presence of tragedy or great affliction Graham Greene often makes a priest intervene. Here it is Father

Crompton, but, unlike the priest in Brighton Rock, The Power and the Glory, and The Potting Shed, his intervention is not required by the story to give an authoritative clarification of the problems dealt with in the story and to underline that "There's always hope" - the very essence of Greene's writings - but to "canonize" in a way what has already been revealed in Sarah's diary. His role is somewhat akin to that of the "miracles" that ensued after Sarah's death. It is as though Greene wished to say that the Church on earth and the Church in heaven both proclaimed the tremendous power of God's grace as instanced in Sarah's conversion and rapid sanctification. Strictly speaking, therefore, Father Crompton's role is secondary to the story, but it does fulfil an important function: he shatters the complacency of the agnostics, Miles and Bendrix, in a few terse and peremptory phrases he speaks in conversation with them. The priest is not called to console the bereaved but simply to discuss funeral arrangements and to try and get Miles' consent to burial instead of cremation because Sarah had wanted it and had told the priest of her wishes.

Father Crompton, reputedly a Redemptorist, has none of the bonhommie of a Father Rank or the hang-dog look of the whisky priest. He is courteous and correct, but for an agnostic and man-of-the-world like Bendrix he is

> a man with a sour gaunt face (105).
> He had very limited small talk, and his answers fell like trees across the road (106).

(105) Ibid. p.186.

(106) Ibid. p.215.

He knows from Sarah who Bendrix is but of course refrains from any mention of what he had heard about him, and yet, while he offers his hand to Miles at the end of his first interview, he turns his back on Bendrix without saying goodbye - perhaps a lack of courtesy, but perhaps also a well-merited implicit rebuke. Greene's priests are men of flesh and blood with human failings, and this one is no exception. He is spoken of as one of the Redemptorists probably who served up Hell on Sundays in the dark church where Bendrix had last seen Sarah. He is "ugly, haggard, graceless with the Torquemada nose" (107). Greene piles on the pejoratives to give us some idea of the priest as seen through the eyes of an unbelieving but sophisticated world, represented in Bendrix, in order to get beyond appearances, however unflattering, and come to grips with the essential message of faith and hope. Father Crompton's laconic expressions match the austerity of his demeanour. He is a member of the religious community who lays great stress on detachment from the world and fosters a sort of pugnacity in dealing with evil in the world. He does not feel at home outside his monastery, especially in the company of unbelievers and in a social setting:

> Father Crompton was not used to dining out. One had the impression that this was a duty on which he found it hard to keep his mind (108).

Even in religious communities of strict observance one finds the "introverts" and the "extroverts", the men of prayer and penance and the men who mix easily and wish to become all things

(107) Ibid. p.214.

(108) Ibid. p.215.

to all men. In this they represent two tendencies within the Church at large. Fathers Crompton and Clay belong to the first category, Father Rank and the whisky priest belong to the second. And the world needs these two kinds of priests, the contemplative and the active. The fact that it fell to Father Crompton to deal with Sarah was no doubt a great advantage; he could read her soul more clearly than an over-active priest could have done; his spiritual guidance was just what she needed. It seems as if the good mixers among the clergy are often called to make the preliminary contacts that the retiring men of prayer may take them up and develop the spiritual potentialities of would-be converts.

Greene shows a remarkable breadth of understanding in presenting us the various types of priest, but here he indicates the priority of the "inner life" as the very soul of the apostolate, and thus voices what the Church has constantly taught and has stressed for all priests at the Second Vatican Council:

> In manifold ways, especially through approved methods of mental prayer and various voluntary forms of prayer, priests should search for and earnestly beg of God that spirit of genuine adoration by which, along with the people entrusted to them, they can unite themselves intimately with Christ the Mediator (109).

Father Crompton has a high esteem and the constant practice of prayer:

> "Any sort's better than none. It's a recognition of God's power anyway, and that's a kind of praise, I suppose" (110).

(109) The Documents of Vatican II, ed. cit. p.570.
(110) E.A., p.216.

The danger of the contemplative type of priest is narrowness of spirit, seeing the world only in the Johannine sense of the three concupiscences that are at enmity with God; but Father Crompton, for all his unworldliness, is not narrow: he is not shocked by the immorality of the modern world although he does not condone it. He even has a sense of humour about sin:

> "That's never a problem... You get it happening with any open space. And It's winter now anyway" (111).

Nor is he one of those priests who are always harping on the need for better collections at church: "People give what they can". Greene's priests are notably free from covetousness, the reproach most commonly laid at the door of the clergy by writers and speakers less acquainted with clerical life. Father Crompton refuses a "stipend" for a mass for Sarah; he had said one already without it. This is another point where Greene has anticipated more modern trends in the Church.

Balance and prudence are perhaps the outstanding qualities depicted in Father Crompton. When sniped at by Bendrix he replies with perfect self-composure or just ignores the insults, but when his right to intervene in Sarah's burial is denied he shows firmness. To Bendrix's ill-mannered outburst: "Go back to your own people, father, back to your bloody little box and your beads", he counters with gentle irony: "You'll find me there any time you want me (112). And when Miles apologises for his

(111) Ibid. p. 215.

(112) Ibid. p.223.

friend, Father Crompton with exquisite insight says: "You don't need to be (sorry for what he said), I know when a man's in pain" (113).

He is a priest utterly convinced of the Faith by which he lives and ministers to others, but Bendrix reacted sulkily:

> I was glad to get away from that oppressive presence. He had the answers too pat; the amateur could never hope to catch him out, he was like a conjuror who bores one by his very skill (114).

But Father Crompton's purpose is not to score debating points, he is there to carry out Sarah's last wishes according to the laws of the Church she came to recognize as the Body of Christ. He disposes of the stupid idea that cremation would make the resurrection more difficult than would burial, but at the time it was against the Church's laws to ask for cremation, and Father Crompton was a man of obedience. Nowadays the Church has relaxed this rule because cremation is no longer a symbolic action of disbelief in the after-life.

The priest mentions "baptism of desire" - being unaware of Sarah's childhood baptism in France - and therefore claims Sarah among the Church's members (115). And not just an ordinary member, but one who in a short time became a saintly member who has reached her plenitude in heaven, and whom one can not only pray for but also pray to. He had confidences from Sarah

(113) Ibid. p.223. (114) Ibid. p.216.
(115) Et ideo, praeter baptismum aquae, potest aliquis consequi sacramenti effectum ex passione Christi, in quantum quis ei conformatur, pro Christo patiendo... Eadem ratione, aliquis, pervirtutem Spiritus Sancti, consequitur effectum baptismi, non solum sine baptismo aquae sed etiam sine baptismo sanguinis; in quantum scilicet aliquis cor per Spiritum Sanctum movetur ad credendum et diligendum Deum, et poenitendum de peccatis; under etiam dicitur baptismus poenitentiae (St.Thomas Aquinas, Summa T. III, q.66, a.11).

that no one else had, and so he could say to Henry Miles:

> "It seems an odd and impertinent thing to say to you, Mr. Miles, but I don't think you realize what a good woman your wife was" (116)

and no less than ten times does Father Crompton stress Sarah's essential goodness. And his whole attitude represents the Church vis-a-vis a world that corrupts with its false values; the very austerity of the priest is the disciplined strength of a Mother who protects from danger the child of her womb.

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(116) E.A., p.189.

3. A BURNT-OUT CASE

The title of A Burnt-Out Case, 1961, is derived from the medical jargon of a leper colony in the Belgian Congo where most of the story develops. A "burnt-out case" is the term applied to the condition of a leper whose disease has run its course, mutilating his members, but is no longer infectious. Greene applies the term, by analogy, to the psychological and spiritual condition of his leading character, Querry, who after burning himself out with pride in his architectural achievements and his haughty aloofness from his fellow men, experiences a longing for solitude and oblivion, and buries himself in a leper colony run by an atheist Doctor Colin in association with a Community of missionary priests and of nuns.

Greene informs us that he

> "went to the Belgian Congo in January 1959 with a novel already beginning to form in my head by way of a situation - a stranger who turns up in a remote leper colony" (117).

The "stranger" is Querry of this novel. The Power and the Glory apart, this novel is, in my judgement, Greene's most important contribution to theology through the medium of a metaphysical parable, and one that resembles the afore-mentioned novel in that the priest is present from beginning to end, having a decisive yet subtle influence throughout the whole story.

1.

Greene in his dedicatory prologue tells us:

(117) Graham Greene, In Search of a Character (London: The Bodley Head, 1961), p.7.

> This is not a roman à clef, but an attempt go give dramatic expression to various types of belief, half-belief, and non-belief, in the kind of setting, removed from world politics and household preoccupations, where such differences are felt acutely and find expression (118).

And quite explicitly he says:

> "This Congo is a region of the mind".

Since my study of Graham Greene's writings is concerned with the author's literary expression of theology as applied to the modern world and the part that priests play in this world, I summarize my appreciation of A Burnt-Out Case in two sections: A. Unbelief as exemplified in Querry, and B. Querry's gradual conversion to belief in a leper colony run by priests. I think that it is relevant to my work to study Querry at some length because his conversion is brought about very gradually by the example of the missionaries who in their daily lives symbolise the patient work of the Church in the world.

2.

A. QUERRY'S UNBELIEF

Against a background of terrifying human suffering, leprosy, and of realistic and sincere human succour, this "Catholic" (119) novel develops a very simple plot: a taciturn, embittered,

(118) Graham Greene, A Burnt-Out Case (London: Heinemann, 1961), prologue: a letter to Docteur Michel Lechat.

(119) I do not find the term "Catholic, in its ecclesiastical sense, satisfactory when applied to some of Greene's writings. It tends to restrict unduly the wide horizons of his work whose theme is mercy, hope, and love for all men. He uses Catholic characters and situations, especially the Catholic priest, for his purpose, but only because they typify for him the most dramatic expression in the modern world of the Gospel themes illustrated by parables such as the prodigal son and the good Samaritan.

disillusioned man, Querry, is fleeing from the flattery of the world on account of his architectural fame, fleeing from the world itself, having exhausted both his procreative sexual power and his artistic creative talent; he is trying to flee from himself and settle down in peace and quiet far from the madding crowd and as far as possible from his own feelings either of pleasure or remorse for things that happened in the past. He was baptized and brought up in the Christian Faith by simple, devout parents, but he had long ago jettisoned every practice and even concern arising out of religion or the service of his fellow men.

> "I've come to an end. This place, you might say, is the end. Neither the road nor the river go any further" (120).

Querry is the main embodiment of Greene's theme: that the grace of God works almost imperceptibly through a variety of apparently casual contacts and through an atmosphere charged with love for one's neighbour when that neighbour is welcomed with no distinction of class or creed or hope of reward.

Fowler, in Graham Greene's The Quiet American (121) resembles Querry in his self-centredness, sadness, and estrangement from all affection. The "stranger and exile" of Camus is also somewhat similar. And both Fowler and Querry owe something to Conrad Heyst "the modern progenitor of characters who fail in

(120) B.O.C., ed. cit. p.138.
(121)

human involvement" (122).

Querry has lapsed from fame, women, and religion, and

"All I have left me is a certain regard for the truth" (123)

but for the rest of his life wants only to vegetate in silence, unenvious and unenvied, forgetting and forgotten.

In other stories of Graham Greene God's batteries, says Ronald Matthews (124), visibly and almost deafeningly lay siege to the soul, but not in A Burnt-Out Case; here the grace of God works stealthily, imperceptibly as if to leave unruffled a man of culture hidden in the African forest and the solitude of a leper colony. Whereas in The Power and the Glory God is in hot pursuit of the whisky priest, here it is grace prompting a man to discard the world and look into himself knowing that "in interiore hominis habitat veritas", as St. Augustine wrote, but failing to realize that untruth can also make there its abode. And yet he already has an inkling of the truth, because at least he sees its betrayal in the world he leaves behind. The drama of the novel is primarily his gradual awakening to the positive side of Truth.

As a child, Querry inherited the simple faith of his parents and was content to believe, with them, that the surest proof of God's existence was in one's own heart; but later on

(122) Greene admits that Conrad has had a great influence on him: "Reading Conrad - the volume called Youth for the sake of The Heart of Darkness - the first time since I abandoned him about 1932 because his influence on me was too great and too disastrous" (In Search of a Character, ed.cit.p.48).
(123) B.O.C., p.187.
(124) Ronald Matthews, op. cit. p.149.

he studies the historical, logical, philosophical, and etymological arguments for the existence of God and the Divinity of Christ. Meanwhile, however, he seldom prays. One day he makes a startling "discovery" - that any sixth-former could demolish all his arguments. So he is left only with his parents' conviction that God is in their hearts, but not in his because

> it was calloused with pride and success (125),

having also discovered that he loves bodily pleasure but no other person except himself, that his is a talent rather than a genius, that work is everything for him and for his own self-satisfaction. But at length, after his name has become famous as an architect, after designing churches for a worship he does not partake of to a God he no longer believes in, and then a town-hall for politics he abhors, when comparing his achievements with that of a Chartres cathedral, he feels his vocation has petered out, and is overcome with boredom. Sexual pleasure is unable to ward off his sense of emptiness.

This spiritual decline is expressed in the form of a parable by Querry to young Mme. Rycker, wife of a Belgian factory manager in the Congo, whom he accompanies to the capital town of Luc (126). In conversation with the doctor of the leper hospital and the English journalist, Querry reveals his inner

(125) B.O.C., p.203.
(126) This self-disclosure to a young and rather simple Belgian woman comes late in the story, pages 196-205, by which time Querry had begun to take an interest in other people for people's sake.

frustrations; but when speaking with the priests of the leproserie he is reticent and keeps off religious matters.

With the doctor he often broaches the problem of vocation which he interprets as dedication to a work for its own sake regardless of praise or blame, without any motive beyond the satisfaction it can give to the worker. As an architect he was concerned only with space, light, and proportion and with materials only in so far as they affected the former. To see a Doctor Colin working himself to the bone just for other people, and people the most wretched in the world, was a jolt to his self-made values. The sight of the priests and nuns giving themselves unstintingly to the care of the lepers added a dimension to vocation that was missing in the doctor, explicit religion.

And in the stormy interviews Querry has with Parkinson, the journalist, the former sees the contrast between men with a vocation and men with just a job:

> "Men with vocations are different from the others. They have more to lose. Behind all of us in various ways lies a spoilt priest" (127).

This leads him on to recognize that:

> "Perhaps it's true that you can't believe in a god without loving a human being or love a human being without believing in a god" (128),

and therefore that mere self-expression is self-destructive:

> "Self-expression is a hard and selfish thing. It eats everything, even the self. At the end you find you haven't got a self to express" (129).

(127) B.O.C., p.138. (128) Ibid. p.143. (129) Ibid. p.52.

He had now lost all desire for self-expression and saw only self-forgetfulness as the alternative. But, in the face of so much human misery, how could he merely "vegetate"? He began to want to do something useful, if only to earn his keep like an honest man; he didn't mind what it was, but it was not to be out of pity for any of his fellow-creatures:

> "I haven't enough feeling left for human beings to do anything for them out of pity" (130)

~~and~~ he wrote in his diary. He also added, to help him to clarify his motives for Doctor Colin:

> "A vocation is an act of love: it is not a professional career. When desire is dead one cannot continue to make love. I've come to the end of desire and to the end of a vocation. Don't try to bind me in a loveless marriage and to make me imitate what I used to perform with passion. And don't talk to me like a priest about my duty..." (131)

That same night he had a dream; he dreamt he was a priest in disguise hurrying down a railway track in a dark and cold country to meet a priest and ask him to hear his confession and give him some altar wine to say Mass that same night. He met the priest and was about to make his confession and borrow the wine when another priest entered the room and took the decanter away. He broke down... and woke up.

Doctor Colin knew little about religion in the theological and liturgical meaning of the word but, whether he was aware or

(130) Ibid. p.57.
(131) Ibid. p.58.

not, he put into practice St. James' maxim:

> Pure, unspoilt religion, in the eyes of God our Father is this: coming to the help of orphans and widows when they need it, and keeping oneself uncontaminated by the world (1:27).

Both he and his wife, who had died of sleeping sickness in the colony, were dedicated people who were glad to serve the lepers in league with "professional" religious men and women. So when Querry gave a memo of his thoughts to the doctor and begged him not to take a personal interest in the lepers:

> "I will do anything for you in reason, but don't ask me to try to revive..." (132)

(a sentence left half-finished and thrust out into the void, "like a plank from a ship's deck off which a victim has been thrust", comments Greene), Dr. Colin screwed the letter into a ball and tossed it on his table saying impatiently "Scruples, just scruples". And when Querry replied in self-defence: "I tried to explain...", the doctor merely exclaimed: "Who cares?".

"Who cares" went echoing on in Querry's brain. His dream that same night merely reinforced the obsessional thought: "Who cares?". Clearly the doctor cared about his patients, and just as clearly he did not care about Querry's rationalization for his unwillingness to get involved with other people.

"V$_o$cation" was another thought that his dream had dredged up from his subconscience mind and associated itself primarily with the priesthood as the mediator for men in the things

(132) Ibid. p.58.

pertaining to God. He had dreamt he was a priest in disguise and that he had to get wine for Mass that same evening, otherwise it would be too late, he would have missed his life's purpose and effectiveness. But there was something impeding it: fussy women clamouring for attention to distract the priest, and then another priest, not understanding his need, taking the wine away for his Mass. He was unable to be alone with the priest he sought out to hear his confession.

This dream is a parable that enshrines the message of A Burnt-Out Case. Querry slowly began to see that a man's real and abiding vocation should never be allowed to peter out, because it is based on human relationships rather than on talent or genius; that there is a basic priesthood in all men as interpreters and ministers of the Word expressed in all creation. In his dream Querry longs to unburden himself to another priest, but, just as he is about to rendez-vous with hope, he is thwarted.

The following morning he decided to take the first step: he went to the carpenter of the leproserie and showed him how to make the kind of desk and drawing-board that he required,

> and only when that was done did he seek out Doctor Colin to tell him of his decision (133)

"I am glad", Dr. Colin said, "for you".

.....

B. QUERRY'S GRADUAL CONVERSION TO BELIEF

The turning-point in Querry's orientation came after a

(133) Ibid. p.60.

number of influences had worked to snap him out of his shell of pride and selfishness. Pride had been his ruin and so humility had to be the first lesson to learn. Humility is not self-depreciation, a denial of what one has in the way of gifts, but a simple recognition that they <u>are</u> gifts, not self-creations. Therefore, gifts from Whom or What? He went into philosophical arguments about the existence of God, but while recognizing God in theory, he did not wish to acknowledge God as Love that demanded a response in the form of obedience to His Laws.

As a consequence, while prospering in the ways of the world and even gaining a good reputation from the Church on account of his designing of churches, inwardly he began to shrivel up. He had everything that money and fame could purchase. His many lapses with women were glossed over by priests and religious people who thought that his great capacity for love forgave all else, but he knew in his heart that there was no love - that was his first discovery. This discovery was followed by others: his own limitations as an architect, his failure to prevent the suicide of one of his mistresses, people's lack of appreciation for his church architecture which they spoilt with plaster statues, etc. Eventually he came to the conclusion that God did not exist and that all his work had been for his own sake, no matter what purpose his buildings served or what popular opinion said of him as a good religious man. But what sense was there in working just for his own

pleasure? So his passion for work declined, and he felt quite empty, his very emptiness being a craving for something his talent and prosperity could not give him. He remembered with nostalgia the simple contented faith of his parents in whose hearts God lived, but how could he return to childhood? With a wrench he left everything and came to the leper colony to find peace and quiet. Here he found suffering in other people; he was used to that, only here it was more severe, and there were no social conventions to hide it, no pseudo-religious interpretations to read into it a divine punishment for sin, no indifference towards it but dedicated and down-to-earth people spending their lives to relieve it. Here was humility in action not in words and prostrations. Here was love, not flattery.

.....

In A Burnt-Out Case Graham Greene gives us character sketches of priests not only as individuals but also in their community life. He drew upon his personal experience of living with such a community when he visited leper colonies in Yonda and elsewhere in the Belgian Congo, as he tells us in his In Search of a Character (134), but only to depict the general setting and the doctor's treatment of leprosy; therefore, as he says in his prologue to Dr. Michel Lechat

> "It would be a waste of time for anyone to try to identify Querry, the Ryckers, Parkinson, Father Thomas - they are formed from the flotsam of thirty years as a novelist" (135).

Nevertheless in the mission field a lot of pettiness and jealousy, which is frequently rife at home in monasteries and convents, tends to evaporate for the simple reason that each priest has more than enough to do and needs the companionship and co-operation of his fellow priests if he is to survive the hardships of environment and succeed in building up the Mission. Therefore Greene's portrayal of dedicated, simple, jovial, hard-working, almost childish men in charge of a seminary and a leper colony is not unrealistic. In this, perhaps, he points a lesson for the clergy as a whole: re-allocate priestly man power in the Church, spread out more thinly in Catholic countries so as to spare priests for the advance-posts of the Church on the

(134) Graham Greene, In Search of a Character, ed. cit. p.18.
(135) B.O.C., introductory letter.

foreign missions and to allow more scope for the priests at home working in brotherly association with lay people, Christians and non-Christians, for the reconstruction of society at all levels.

Querry meets the priests when he embarks on what was known as the Bishop's boat whose captain was a priest with the job of sailing the paddle-steamer with its crew of six Africans and a dozen deck-passengers up and down the river calling at the fishing villages to pick up passengers and cargo. He is given the Bishop's cabin during the journey and then is invited to stay at the mission seminary for a night before continuing to the leper colony.

At the seminary the priests impress Querry by their individual personal characteristics which in any other walk of life could have made for success:

> One father, with a trim pointed beard, dressed in an open khaki shirt, reminded the passenger of a young officer of the Foreign Legion he had once known in the East...; another of the fathers might have been taken for a professor of economics, a third for a lawyer, a fourth for a doctor (136).

At the same time he was surprised, and annoyed, at their almost childish delight in the simplest things:

> but the too easy laughter, the exaggerated excitement over some simple game of cards with matches for stakes had the innocence and immaturity of isolation (137);

and yet he knew they were men of no mean intellectual capacity.

(136) Ibid. p.9.
(137) Ibid. p.9.

He had come from a world of sophistication and was trying to forget it and all its works and pomps -

> And yet - he could not tell why - their laughter irritated him, like a noisy child or a disc of jazz. He was vexed by the pleasure which they took in small things - even in the bottle of whisky he had brought for them from the boat (138).

Spontaneity and candour ought to have been refreshing to Querry, but beneath his surprise was an incipient feeling of loss. These were men of God, and God was real to them, but had their vocation also lost its passion and become hum-drum like any ordinary marriage? The idea of God and of love occurred to him now among the childish laughter and pranks of a common-room - even though the walls of his buildings were mute, these children were vocal with His praise (Wisdom 10:20) - but he did not dwell on this thought, he got up irritated and paced up and down the dreary room.

When one of the priests calls at his room to see whether he has everything he needs, soap, towel, etc., Querry is moved to an initial self-disclosure:

> "I suffer from nothing. I no longer know what suffering is",

to which the priest, without further questioning, gave him a simple reply:

> "Oh well, you know, suffering is something which will always be provided when it is required" (139),

which set Querry thinking.

(138) Ibid. pp. 9-10.
(139) Ibid. p.12.

A few days later Querry finds himself installed in the house of the priests in charge of the leproserie. His room is next-door to the chapel and is awakened at six in the morning by the prayers and chants of the community. They live an austere, hard-working life, and left him unmolested:

> Even the questions they found necessary were phrased like statements: "On Sundays a bus calls here at six-thirty if you wish to go to Mass" (140).

The same air of childish boisterousness and glee reigned as in the seminary. This came to a head when the new hospital was inaugurated, after the religious solemnities were over. But by that time Querry had come to relish their innocent amusement and even to share it. He was already beginning to change.

The priests, all of them except one, seemed more intent on providing the lepers with comforts and remedies, and the mission plant with modern amenities and equipment, than on rooting out immoral customs or implanting Christian doctrines and usages:

> The fathers were unconcerned with private lives. A husband, after he had been cured, left the leproserie and his wife moved into the hut of another man, but the fathers asked no questions... The fathers were too busy to bother themselves with what the Church considered sin (moral theology was the subject they were least concerned with) (141).

These words have given rise to much misunderstanding, but I maintain that when properly understood they convey an attitude

(140)Ibid. pp. 26-27.
(141)Ibid. pp. 154-155.

of mind that has since been authoritatively endorsed by the Second Vatican Council. First of all, we are dealing with poor lepers, baptized and non-baptized, who are still largely pagan in their upbringing and outlook, who have to be treated as victims both of disease and spiritual corruption, who have to become enlightened gradually through active charity rather than through exhortation. Not that the priests neglected to impart the Gospel and the Sacraments to them, witness the simple yet profoundly Christian sermon preached at Mass by the Superior of the Mission (142), but, as children, the patients learned through example. Secondly, thanks to the re-orientation officially launched by the Council, our text-books of moral theology are now seen to be deficient in several respects. They were riddled with legalism, with a casuistry that went to infinite pains to let consciences "off the hook" of mortal sin instead of inspiring them to be more generous regardless of minutiae and hair-splitting distinctions. Priests themselves, especially in the mission-field, have usually thrown off the barnacles of the seminary training conducive to scrupulosity and narrowness of outlook, but that is not to say they are indifferent to the love of God and of man which is the essence of moral theology. As priests mix with people and receive their inmost confidences they become increasingly less disposed to judge people by abstract principles and rules, and listen more attentively to the

(142) Ibid. pp. 100-103.

subjective conscience and its possibilities of growth in sensitiveness to the inspirations of grace. They are tired of some of the old text-book labelling: mortal sin, venial sin, imperfection, as though a whole personality could be emptied into water-tight compartments and classified as dead or alive spiritually. They are more and more aware of Christ's reproach to the lawyers of His day who

> load on men burdens that are unendurable, burdens that you yourselves do not move a finger to lift (Luke 11:46)

and their deeper insights and experience of the workaday world are contributing to an overhaul of moral theology based on the Christian principles of redemption and the freedom of the children of God rather than on Aristotelian principles of natural law. Hence, when Greene wrote the above comments on priests in the Congo, in 1961, he was expressing an attitude that was gradually forming in the Catholic conscience of priests with real pastoral experience. The misunderstanding of this renewal has prompted some people to skirt the dangerous slopes of "situation ethics" evolved from relativism, and others to cry out "traitors" because theologians have left the beaten track of legalism. The priests of the Congo Mission, including the Bishop, are firm in their convictions - with one exception - but life among the outcasts of society has taught them tolerance and the art of peaceful penetration through love as the best and only way to sap the foundations of Satan's rule.

The Bishop of the Mission appears only once and then at a social gathering in the residence of the Governor.

> The Bishop was a tall rakish figure with a neatly trimmed beard and the roving eye of an old-fashioned cavalier of the boulevards (143).

There is a trace of the old world about him, but none of the feudal pomp and splendour so often attached to bishops. He owns the paddle-steamer, but only in the name of the diocese, and his cabin meagrely furnished with "a crucifix, a chair, a table, a cupboard where cockroaches lurked, and one picture... of some church in Europe" (144) is available to all and sundry, at least missionaries and Europeans. At the Governor's party the Bishop refuses to be drawn into a discussion of the motives for Querry's arrival at the leper colony, and shows himself very human by teaching Mme. Rycker to play bridge. He does not offer the men his ring to be kissed but allows the women to do so if they are eager to. He exemplifies what the Vatican II was later to say to bishops all over the world:

> They should also be mindful of their obligation to give an example of holiness through charity, humility, and simplicity of life (145).

The captain of the boat is the first priest Querry meets, and he is quite content to let his passenger go unquestioned about his motives for burying himself in the leproserie. He was

(143) Ibid. p.76.
(144) Ibid. p.78.
(145) The Documents of Vatican II, op. cit. p.407.

a teacher of Greek at the diocesan seminary, but at the bishop's request makes no fuss about taking on the captaincy of the boat which "was not a very popular job among the members of the Order", although he knows very little about it. He is what one might call a "conservative" type of priest, always wearing the cassock, saying Mass on his own at four o'clock in the morning, reading his breviary in spite of the suffocating heat on board, and hearing confessions whenever requested. He is polite to Querry and explains to him anything of interest on the journey. At the seminary he creates confusion by his harmless pranks at cards. He is not devoid of good humour and for a man of considerable culture he carries his learning lightly. He is a keen shot with "a passion for slaughtering any living thing, as though only man had the right to a natural death" (146). In his spare time he busies himself "manufacturing cheap rosaries" for the poor Christians of the mission.

Father Jean is perhaps the most congenial figure among the Mission priests, which his incessant flow of good-humoured patter and the little mannerisms that betray something of his "ugly past" as a man of the world. He is keen to get material improvements in the premises: air-conditioning, a drug-store, and an electric fan in the delivery ward. He has a "Flemish appetite" and when the occasion calls for a celebration he does justice to the drinks. When one of the priests remarks that

(146) B.O.C., p.8.

perhaps it is "woman-trouble" that has sent Querry away from Europe, he retorts, thinking perhaps of his own past,

> "Woman-trouble is not a very exact description, aren't we all supposed to run away from it? St. Augustine's wish to wait awhile is not universally recommended" (147).

The priests have taken leave of the outside world, but Father Jean suggests to the Superior that they should not lose all contact, and with his dry humour explains:

> "What I mean is it's a little like one of those Palais Royal farces that one has read... The injured husband pops in and out" (148)

when asked to throw light on the estrangement between M.Rycker and his young wife who has sought refuge in the Mission. He further suggests that the Community should import a certain amount of popular reading matter and illustrations, "for example, the last movie magazines including pictures of Brigitte Bardot". All in puckish humour, but sometimes indicative of a struggle within himself to keep to his vow of celibacy:

> "Sometimes I think God was not entirely serious when he gave man the sexual instinct... Nor when he invented moral theology. After all, it was St. Thomas Aquinas who said that he made the world in a play" (149).

It is significant that Father Jean

> ..spoke in the dry precise tones that he was accustomed to use in discussions on moral theology so as to rob of emotion any question dealing with sexual sin (150).

(147) Ibid. p.241.
(148) Ibid. p.245.
(149) Ibid. p.245.
(150) Ibid. p.241.

He is, or had been "a brilliant moral theologian" before entering the Order, and within the Community he proves to be a salutary, balancing influence.

When Querry is suspected of trying to take Mme. Rycker away from her husband, it is Father Jean who, in the absence of the Superior, defends Querry's innocence against the odd man out among the priests, Father Thomas; and with his intellectual brilliance and good humour he rallies to the defence of the suspected one the rest of the Community. But he was also a man who could forgive:

> Father Jean proposed the toast of Father Thomas who did not respond (151)

when celebrating the inaguration of the new hospital.

Father Paul works in harness with the lay brother Philippe and mostly does the tasks of a lay brother, being the chief mechanic and factotum of the Mission plant. He is concerned about the Community meals and general physical welfare. Common sense and a deep sense of loyalty to his confreres are the characteristics that make him a treasure to the Community. When Father Thomas predicts for the Community great afflictions on account of the scandal he attributed to Querry and Mme. Rycker once it became public knowledge, Father Paul recalls the prophet of doom to his senses and allays his fears.

Father Joseph is the hardest manual worker in the leper colony, in spite of the many years he has spent there. He not

(151) Ibid. p.226.

only supervises the building works done by the lepers but gives the lead:

> A gang of lepers was pounding the last square yards supervised by Father Joseph who worked beside them, beating away himself at the ground in his old khaki pants and a soft hat which looked as though it had been washed up on the beach many years ago (152).

He got on well both with Doctor Colin and Querry who appreciated his constancy and thoroughness within his limited skills. He is not an architect, not even a builder, but just a bricklayer; but his work is a labour of love, of love for God and the lepers and his fellow religious. One could mistake him for a Trappist monk, except for his high-pitched voice. He is not without original ideas which he confidentially communicates to Querry:

> "Of course it's for the Superior and the doctor to decide, but I would like to build a place where the mutilated can learn to work - occupational therapy, I suppose they call it at home. The sisters do what they can with the individuals, especially the mutilated. No one wants to be a special case. They would learn much quicker in a class where they could joke a bit (153).

Here is a real "worker priest" who does not forget his priestly prayer in his work, who, like St. Teresa of Avila, found God "among the pots and pans" as easily as in the chapel, and among bricks and mortar in the Congo as readily as in Europe. Querry is captivated by this rugged, single-minded,

(152) Ibid. p.16.
(153) Ibid. p.162.

God-loving man who is at everyone's service and is particularly obedient to his Superior. He is a practical man and even in his priestly ministrations adheres to the maxim: "Sacraments are for men" and does not refuse them as long as there is some spark of faith making it possible to receive them fruitfully (154).

Allied to his sense of humour is, as in Father Jean, a keen sense of fairness. He too makes it quite clear that the evidence against Querry is far from convincing, and on the other hand the whole Community is indebted to Querry for his co-operation as an architect and a builder. And after Querry's death, at the hands of a jealous and wrongly suspicious M.Rycker, it is Father Joseph who says "unofficially a prayer at the grave" seeing that the hide-bound Father Thomas had refused to conduct a Christian burial for the victim.

Self-denial, open-heartedness, obedience, and inward peace characterize Father Joseph and subtly influence Doctor Colin and Querry enabling them to see Christianity in terms of the Master and His Gospel. He stands for the immense number of religious men and women of the Catholic Church scattered all over the world, hidden from publicity even ecclesiastical, but silently carrying forward the Church's work of redemption in the world of to-day. Waking up on his first morning in the leper colony, Querry hears the prayers and chants in the chapel

(154) Ibid. p.111.

next door; then he has breakfast with the priests, but he notices that Father Joseph "had already started the labourers to work on clearing the ground for the new hospital" (155). Little did he realize at the time that Father Joseph and the other priests and nuns, and the doctor with his patients, were already starting his mind to work on clearing the rocks and rubble of pride and lust for a new outlook on life. The grace of God can be found anywhere and everywhere.

Father Thomas may be bracketed with Father Clay, of The Heart of the Matter, as the most obnoxious priestly characters described by Graham Greene. M.Rycker is Father Thomas' lay counterpart. All three have one thing in common - what the French would call, with a touch of irreverence, "bondieuserie", and the Spanish with starker realism: "mojigatería". It is an unseemly mixture of self-complacency, religious fanaticism, pseudo-unworldliness, and escapism preening the feathers of borrowed ascetical and mystical experience. The modern equivalent would be "unauthenticity" - which Greene excoriates in season and out of season.

> Father Thomas, with his eyes like stones in the pale clay of his face, swallowed his coffee in a hurry, like nauseating medicine, and was off to superintend the two schools (156).

This most unattractive figure in A Burnt-Out Case is described in greater detail than any other of the priests and

(155) Ibid. p.26.
(156) Ibid. p.26.

stands out like a sore thumb throughout the story, and in the otherwise harmonious Community. Greene disclaims any identification of Father Thomas in the leper colonies he visited; it is a synthetic figure formed out of the flotsam - and jetsam - of the author's wide experience of priests. But at the same time one is bound to confess that it is a realistic portrait of a certain type of priest, fortunately very much less frequently met with in modern times, especially on the foreign missions. This type of priest incarnates in extreme measure a certain mentality deriving from a post-Tridentine misunderstanding of spirituality and the Church's mission. At Trent the Church, faced with the landslide of half of Europe into rebellion against Rome - and this was also saturated with pseudo-piety but clad in biblical speech instead of scholastic terminology - made an effort to close the ranks and man the ramparts for a prolonged siege; the misunderstanding came when martial law took over in the Church with its severe censorship, its curfew banning all forms of association "in sacris", and a general attitude of escapism from a wicked world that had thrown off the paternal tutelage of the Church. Drawbridge, windows and doors on the world were closed to a great extent, and the parapets and embrasures were rather look-outs for the Enemy than means of ventilation and light within the Fortress. This, of course, is an exaggeration of the Church's firm stand on dogmatic positions acquired painfully throughout the preceding centuries, but it

is an exaggeration that no small number of priests and religious translated into terms of spirituality and true Christian perfection. Contempt for the body and material creation is a tendency going back to Zoroastrianism and perhaps far beyond, and the Church has always tried to strike a balance between this and what we now recognize as the prevalent mentality in our western society: materialism, by clinging to the Mystery of the Incarnation whereby the Word was made flesh and all material things were to serve the spirit without losing their identity and goodness.

Graham Greene feels keenly the need for the integration of the material and the spiritual worlds and sees pride as the greatest obstacle, not sexual weakness. He wants to convey the message of redemption through God's mercy enfolding human weakness but thwarted by human pride. And priests must be the leaders of men, so, however beset with weakness themselves, they are still God's instruments of redemption as long as they do not think themselves better than other men and turn the great gift of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom into a trap for self-deception and lording it over others whose vocation in life is not theirs.

Querry meets Father Thomas in the common-room on the first day of his arrival and notices how different he is from the other members of the Community. That observation is reinforced by an unexpected visit from Father Thomas to his room. He gives

the impression of a man with a persecution mania, always on edge, never happy in his present condition and occupation, as though his whole personality were in a state of siege. True enough, he is not suited to the work entrusted to him: the supervision of two schools. He is the last man in the world to deal successfully with children. Even his physical appearance has something disjointed about it:

> Father Thomas's long narrow nose was oddly twisted at the end; it gave him the effect of smelling sideways at some elusive odour (157)

which, of course, is Greene's way of symbolizing an inquisitorial mentality. Not once does he smile frankly, only an occasional smirk. He is always in a hurry - a nervous twitch of the whole body. He is abrupt in manner and rash in judgement (158); he is a prophet of doom, imagining all sorts of calamities that may never happen. He flits from extreme adulation to unwarranted suspicion, with sentiment and the latest impressions for his only guides. At first he canonizes Querry as a Saint who has trampled underfoot all that the world treasures and has come out of the purest Christian motives to serve the lepers in Christ's name. He will not listen to his colleagues when they advise him not to jump to conclusions, to wait and see and hear Querry out, and in the meantime to respect his privacy. No, Father Thomas barges into Querry's room and

(157) Ibid. p.113.
(158) Ibid., passim, but notably: "She is with child... Your child". p.232.

and embarrasses the poor man by asking him to be his spiritual guide because nobody in the Community can help him, they are too busy about material things whereas only one thing is necessary, and he, like Mary the sister of Martha, has chosen the better part. He breaks down and weeps in the presence of Querry, and in answer to Querry's remonstrances and his inability to help the priest, Father Thomas without a shred of evidence replies:

> "Don't you see that perhaps you've been given the grace of aridity? Perhaps even now you are walking in the footsteps of St. John of the Cross, the noche oscura" (159).

He prided himself on his "discernment of spirits" and would not take a common-sense hint from the down-to-earth agnostic Doctor Colin when canonizing Querry later on:

> "You are a very good doctor, but all the same I think we are better judges of a man's spiritual condition... You must allow us to have a good nose for - well... heroic virtue (160).

Father Thomas and Doctor Colin speak two different languages and belong to two different worlds and it is Greene's ambition to keep the lines of communication open and to make it clear that the two worlds are within the same person.

> "It was a happy day for all of us when he arrived here. Who could have foreseen it? The great Querry", said Father Thomas. "And even happier day for him" the doctor replies. "It's much more difficult to cure the mind than the body, and yet I think the cure is nearly complete".

(159) Ibid. p.116.
(160) Ibid. p.230.

"The better the man the worse the aridity",
Father Thomas said (161).

This, I think, admirably sums up the "two worlds" that have to be integrated. Greene comments: 'Father Thomas's sentiments were impeccable", and observes that "Father Paul winked at Father Jean". The Church with all its treasures of grace and indwelling of the Spirit has a language for "the perfect" and disposes of a mystical theology that one day may well be her normal medium of communication with the mystical Orient, both Christian and pagan; but for the pragmatic West the lingua franca is that of dedication and the service of man in his wretchedness: Christian Humanism. Father Thomas has "impeccable sentiments" but they are borrowed and in him they are rootless.

The doctor replies:

> "Surely you assume too much. His case may be much simpler than that. A man can believe for half his life on insufficient reason, and then he discovers his mistake".

Father Thomas now becomes offensive:

> "You talk, doctor, like all atheists, as though there were no such thing as grace. Belief without grace is unthinkable, and God will never rob a man of grace. Only a man himself can do that - by his own actions. We have seen Querry's actions here, and they speak for themselves".
>
> "I hope you won't be disappointed", the doctor said. "In our treatment we get burnt-out cases, too. But we don't say they are suffering from aridity. We only say the disease has run its course" (162).

(161) Ibid. p.229.
(162) Ibid. p.229.

Here, in my opinion, we have the heart of the story. Dr. Colin has sufficient psychological discernment to see that Querry's leprosy of the mind (163) is the result of pride and aloofness from his fellow beings, and the stay at the Mission among humble dedicated men is convincing him that here lies his cure. The doctor does not go beyond the terms of reference familiar to him as a man and a medical man, he does not venture into mysticism which for him is an unknown territory; but on the other hand Father Thomas rushes in where angels fear to tread.

Mme. Rycker is pregnant and affirms that Querry is the father. Father Thomas's world of illusion about Querry crashes about him. If the pious young woman says so, it must be so; just as when the ecclesiastical press lauded Querry's achievements in church architecture and glossed over his loose living and called him a Saint, Father Thomas was absolutely convinced. But now, one mere suspicion of sexual lapse, and all the mystical trials of Querry are humbug. Clearly Father Thomas is not a man of balance, in contrast to the other members of the Community, especially the Superior. And taking for granted that Querry is the culprit, he pronounces his woes:

> "Rycker will want a separation. He may even sue Querry for divorce, and the newspapers will print the whole edifying story... Do you suppose the General will be pleased when he reads at his breakfast-table the scandal at our leproserie"? (164).

(163) Ibid. p.138; pp.33-34: "I can't feel at all, I am a leper".
(164) Ibid. p.241.

Adverse publicity is his great fear. He is a frightened man at the best of times - afraid to go to the hospital by night, afraid of the dark in his own cell, afraid of what the Superior General may think - and now he goes to pieces. Coupled with childish fears is pride, even pride in his spiritual problems. He thinks nobody understands him - how can the simple dove understand the soaring eagle? He recalls the words of the pharisee in the parable: "God, I thank you I am not like other men" (Luke 18:11). Because Querry is "famous", Father Thomas is anxious to share even his room with him, and hopes that Querry's fame will somehow rub off onto the Community and attract generous economic aid. He is anxious to be in a position of authority and bend others to his will, and yet he is most unsure of himself. He is not above intrigue and telling tales. He is put temporarily in charge during the Superior's absence, but only to teach him the lesson that whoever wants to be the first must be the last and the servant of all.

Father Thomas is a "synthetic" figure summing up the features of the worst kind of "clericalism" and the pathetic shortcomings of a man without a religious vocation or a vocation that is breaking up. He is a psychopath who lives in a world of his own governed by fear and megalomania:

> "When I finished at the seminary I sometimes thought that only by martyrdom could I save myself - if I could die before I lost everything (165).

He thinks in terms of extremes: heroic sanctity or eternal

(165) Ibid. p.113.

condemnation; nothing less will satisfy the great Father Thomas. The hot-house atmosphere of the seminary did him more harm than good; if only he had a less exalted idea of himself he might have profited greatly from those years of retirement from the world, as have so many other priests who, while thankful for the seminary training, had enough humility and common sense to realize it was only the beginning of their apprenticeship to the priestly life not its highest expression.

Subjectivism or "wishful-thinking" brings Father Thomas into ridicule and, but for the prevailing atmosphere of cordiality in the Community, would have precipitated a more serious crisis. Had he been exposed to the knocks of the world outside he might have been cured, just as Querry was cured of a similar pride and subjectivism by the reverse process. It is as though Graham Greene were making a plea for genuine vocations to the priesthood and for the weeding out of pseudo-vocations. In this he also anticipates the modern practice of the Church which has come to apply depth psychology as well as Gospel precept and mystical experience to the recognition of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, dealing more leniently with requests for secularization while maintaining the ideals for our guidance, ideals based on personal involvement rather than flight from the world.

Graham Greene singles out Father Thomas as a misfit in the

Community. He is contemptuous of his colleagues because they busy themselves with such pedestrian tasks as the daily chores of a household, because they are not obsessed with philosophical and theological problems, because they have praise for people who show the weaknesses of the flesh (166). He is eaten up by scruples, doubts, and misgivings. As a priest, he is a failure. As a man, he is a neurotic. Because of his pride and aloofness he is not cured - an example that Querry could not but observe and ponder. Greene summs up in the following paragraph:

> He was the only priest in the leproserie with whom the Superior felt ill at ease; he still seemed to carry with him the strains and anxieties of the seminary. He had left it longer ago than any of the others, but he seemed doomed to a perpetual and unhappy youth; he was ill at ease with men who had grown up and were concerned over the problems of the electric light plant or the quality of the brick-making rather than over the pursuit of souls (167).

I should just like to qualify the statement "of the seminary". Those who have passed through the seminary were perhaps meticulous in observing the rules, but for most of them it was a joyful, care-free experience, not one of scruples and anxieties. They were immature, but they knew that it was only the first phase of their apprenticeship and that their temporary withdrawal from the world was "reculer pour mieux sauter". Unfortunately there are priests who never seem to grow up, like Father Thomas. And there is also a mentality in the Church that

(166) Ibid. cfr. p.108.
(167) Ibid. pp. 104-105.

in the name of holy obedience would like to see all initiative left to those in authority - and to the fewer the better. But the recent Vatican Council issued a powerful plea to clergy and laity to "grow up" and face the challenge of the modern world.

The Superior is depicted as a man of extraordinary charity and forbearance. One might say that of all the priests portrayed by Graham Greene until now he is the most congenial. His role in A Burnt-Out Case is very important as a kind of keystone to the arch giving unity and strength to the interior drama enacted principally in the mind of Querry and revealing the role of the Church as an ark of salvation and a refuge for sinners.

There is a quality of real leadership about the Superior, who, by the way, is never given any other name; and yet that leadership is not incompatible with certain human weaknesses that far from undermining his authority only render him more attractive and loved by others.

> The only trouble the Superior ever caused him was with the cheroot which the priest was never without, except when saying Mass and in sleep (168)

says Greene about the priest's dealings with Doctor Colin. We may surmise that the author had Winston Churchill in mind when mentioning the cheroot, Churchill as a leader in time of war.

(168) Ibid. p.17.

The Superior himself acknowledges his carelessness - "Really I am impossible" - but never fails to remain in command of the situation in hand. Balance and good humour are his outstanding qualities that endear him to all except Father Thomas, so that when he absented himself from the Community for a while and left Father Thomas in charge,

> They watched him now unobtrusively, with affection, as one might watch a dying man (only Father Thomas was absent: he had already gone to move his papers into the other's room) (169).

The whole scene of his leave-taking reminds us of chapter 20 of the Acts of the Apostles where St. Paul leaves Miletus for Jerusalem and says good-bye to his converts.

Good manners are another of the Superior's distinctive features (170). He never intrudes. In a difficult situation like that created by Mme. Rycker when she insists on speaking to Querry, the Superior apologizes for disturbing him. Anxious to say good-bye to Doctor Colin, he nevertheless refrains from encroaching on the doctor's afternoon siesta. His sheer humanity wins the day. The leproserie is very short of money, but he is determined that the lepers shall not go without the medicines they need. He has a great reverence for another person's conscience and does not pry into motives - which was just what

(169) Ibid. p.166.
(170) Many of the upsets in a religious Community are due to lack of good manners.

Querry was hoping to find.

Tact and prudence are essential to a Superior, particularly when he is obliged to ask the Community to abide by an unpopular decision of his. He knows that Father Thomas is the odd man out, but feels that a little taste of "superiorship" will serve to dispel illusion of grandeur and thereby benefit the whole Community as well as the priest himself.

> "Father Thomas has brought me a letter. The Bishop wants me in Luc. I may be away some weeks or even months and I am asking Father Thomas to act for me during my absence" (171).

And to lighten the burden of disappointment felt by the Community, he adds:

> "You are the only one, Father, with the time to look after the accounts". It was an apology to the other fathers and a hidden rebuke to the pride which Father Thomas was already beginning to show (172).

His parting shot was to touch Father Thomas on the arm and say:

> "Be careful of yourself, Father Thomas. Not too much enthusiasm" (173).

When asked to intervene with the nuns and get them to serve up a better meal to the Community at least on Sunday, the Superior declines because he knows the nuns think their Sunday menu is looked forward to by the priests, so he says "I wouldn't like to disillusion the poor things". The same tact is called

(171) B.O.C., p.165.
(172) Ibid. p.165.
(173) Ibid. p.168.

for, and much more so, when dealing with the irascible and hypersensitive Father Thomas; on occasions however he resorts to straight talking:

> "I can well understand why you are attracted to Querry. You are both men of extremes. But in our way of life it is better for us not to have heroes - not live ones, that is. The saints should be enough for us... But don't let's recognize them before the Church does. We shall be saved a lot of disappointment that way (174).

But even this straight talking is tactful and casts no aspersions on Father Thomas's ulterior motives.

When discontentment pervades a Community on account of one person who is clearly a misfit, the Superior has the unenviable task of trying to remove the offender without causing offence in return. Thus the Superior at the leproserie calls Father Thomas to his room, shows him exquisite courtesy, and says:

> "Father Thomas, can you spare me a minute... We all of us have a feeling of frustration sometimes... I'm not sure that you'd find better material in some of the parishes of Liège, though sometimes I've wondered whether perhaps you might be happier here. The African mission is not for everyone. If a man feels himself ill-adapted here, there's no defeat in asking for a transfer. Do you sleep properly Father?" (175).

In his dealings with the lepers he discovers that showing them a little human affection can work wonders and is accepted sometimes with greater eagerness than medicines. He thus has a

(174) Ibid. p.110.
(175) Ibid. pp. 108-109.

role complementary to Doctor Colin:

> "But all the same, doctor, you've said it yourself, leprosy is a psychological problem. It may be very valuable for the leper to feel loved" (176).

His example of concern for other people prompts Querry to reflect that when this world reaches the end of its energy and heat there will still be gestures of protection for other people. The Superior replies: "You believe that? But once I remember you saying you were incapable of love" (177).

As a man of action and co-ordination the Superior sees a problem from various angles. So when Doctor Colin calls "leprophile" a naive little nun who dreads the day when all leprosy would be cured and she would be left without someone to care for, the Superior reminds the doctor of another aspect: that of an "old maid". He is a man of synthesis rather than analysis, and therefore does not recommend too much probing into motives either his own or other people's, because, like the centipede analyzing its leg movements, it would merely bring him to a halt and get nowhere:

> "Oh, mine's a very superficial reading, like your own diagnosis, doctor. But it would be a good thing for all of us if we were even more superficial. There's no real harm in a superficial judgement, but if I begin to probe into what lies behind that desire to be of use, oh well, I might find some terrible things, and we are all tempted to stop when we reach that point. Yet if we dug further, who knows? - the terrible too might be only a few skins deep. Anyway it's safer to make superficial judgements. They can always be shrugged off. Even by the victims" (178).

(176) Ibid. p. 20. (177) Ibid. p.94. (178) Ibid. p.21.

The Superior's reflexions concerning Rycker, his advice to Father Thomas, his talks with Doctor Colin, all bear the stamp of a balanced and shrewd leader whose theology is healthy, open to development, and deeply rooted in a soil where the seed of the Gospel has been carefully nurtured. He has a sense of priorities as regards the urgency of tasks: heal the sick before building sumptuous churches, feed the hungry before venturing into psychological analysis, teach the illiterate to read and write before indulging oneself in theological speculation:

> "The old church, you know, will serve us a long time yet. Only half our people are Catholics. Anyway it's no use having a great church if the people still live in mud huts... The new hospital too is a long way from being finished. Any money we can beg or steal must go to equipping it" (179).

In 1961, when Greene wrote this novel, certain ideas expressed were regarded as dangerous and nearly heretic. In the abstract everyone agrees that the catechist's primary job is to teach the fundamental of the Christian Revelation, therefore a theology based on abstractions and measured by principles only was inclined to share Father Thomas's disgust at the Community's concentration on simple human needs before imparting the catechism; but that abstractionist outlook has received a severe jolt in modern times, thanks largely to the influence of the foreign Missions over the Europeanized part of the Church, an influence that was confirmed at the Second Vatican Council

(179) Ibid. pp. 86-87.

as illustrated by its documents, in particular the Constitution on The Church and the Modern World. It is all part of a great awakening to the implications of a fundamental Christian stand on Christ's universal role in the uplift of the human race. If a pagan could say: "Nihil humani a me alienum puto" the authentic Christian will go still further: not merely "puto" - "I reckon" - but "est"; no human problem is beyond the orbit of redemption in Christ and no real Christian can fail to involve himself in the development of human life at all its levels.

At the World Congress of Catholic theologians held in Brussels in September of 1970 one of the leading "traditionalist" theologians of the Church said these memorable words:

> "I am sixty-six years old; the basis of my ideas and my convictions dates from before World War II. The Council sought to envisage a situation which has substantially evolved in the post-conciliar period... To-day's culture is a totally secular one. Its leaders are for the most part atheists. My generation has to make a great effort to grasp the novelty of contemporary problems. In my case the results of this effort have been mediocre. The magisterium of the Church is not infrequently short-sighted. Before this totally new situation, I have personally decided to live with that movement of the Holy Spirit which carries on the work of Jesus. I would be much more comfortable in the world of classical Catholic culture, perhaps even in the world of the Middle Ages. But I have no right to ensconce myself in this way. I have done enough of laboratory theology. I have decided to make an effort towards change in the sense marked out by this congress which is a step in the line of post-conciliar progress" (180).

(180) Yves Congar, "The Frontiers of Theology", <u>The Tablet</u> (26.9.1970) p.922.

The priests in Graham Greene's writings have for many years been exponents of this theology of human realities, and before the Council of the Catholic Episcopacy spoke out, many of Greene's ideas incurred severe criticism from the old-guard traditionalist theologians. The Superior of A Burnt-Out Case sums up the re-orientation very neatly in his reminder to Father Thomas: "We are here to help, Father, not condemn". The emphasis rests on the theology of hope that is now in the fore-front of theological thinking. And this is the theology under-lying the Superior's captivating and simple sermon to the lepers:

> "Yezu is God and Yezu made the world. When you make a song you are in the song, when you bake bread you are in the bread, when you make a baby you are in the baby; and because Yezu made you, he is in you. When you love it is Yezu who loves, when you are merciful it is Yezu who is merciful. But when you hate or envy it is not Yezu, for everything that Yezu made is good. Bad things are not there - they are nothing. Hate means no love. Envy means no justice. They are simply empty spaces" (181).

Behind these utterly simple phrases lies the doctrine of man as created to God's image and likeness (182); of grace and the nature of evil (183); of love and divine Mercy. Querry had complained that Christians were without love and justice, so the Superior takes the cue and identifies love and mercy and honesty with Christianity:

(181) B.O.C., p.101. Cfr. p.196.
(182) Cfr. The Power and the Glory, pp.129-130; Summa Th. I, q.93, a.1.
(183) Cfr. Summa Theol. I, q.49, art. 1.

> "Now I tell you that when a man loves, he must be Klistian. When a man is merciful he must be Klistian. In this village do you think you are the only Klistians - you who come to church? There is a doctor who lives near the well beyond Marie Akimbu's house, and he prays to Nzambe and he makes bad medicine. He worships a false God, but once when a piccin was ill and his father and mother were in the hospital he took no money. I tell you then he was a Klistian, a better Klistian than the man who broke Henry Okapa's bicycle. He not believe in Yezu, but he a Klistian. I am not a thief, who steal away his charity to give to Yezu. I give back to Yezu only what Yezu made. Yezu made love, he made mercy. Everybody in the world has something that Yezu made. Everybody in the world is that much a Klistian. So how can I be a thief? There is no man so wicked he never once in his life show in his heart something that God made" (184).

This is just another way of saying with the New Testament that God created us through His Eternal Son and in Him and for Him - the Son who became Man and identified Himself with us and identified His followers by the hallmark of our love for one another. The Superior is aware that Querry and Doctor Colin are within earshot and speaks to them as much as to the poor lepers. And from this basic revelation of Christianity he draws the moral conclusions:

> "I do not tell you to do good things for the love of God. That is very hard. Too hard for most of us. It is much easier to show mercy because a child weeps or to love because a girl or a young man pleases your eye. That's not wrong, that's good. Only remember that the love you feel and the mercy you show were made in you by God. You must go on using them and perhaps if you pray Klistian prayers it makes it easier for you to show mercy a second time and a third time.." (185).

(184) B.O.C., p.102.
(185) Ibid. pp. 102-103.

Querry is uneasy. He tries to convince Doctor Colin that there is no need to drag God into a world of crime. He says he envies the doctor's aloofness and unconcern for all transcendental motives. If he followed his servant into the forest one day and stayed by him in the dark and rain all night, he said it was "Curiosity, Pride. Not Klistian love, I assure you" (186). But the doctor was not convinced:

> "All the same you talk as if you'd lost something you'd loved. I haven't. I think I have always liked my fellow men. Liking is a great deal safer than love. It doesn't demand victims. Who is your victim, Querry?"
> "I have none now. I'm safe. I'm cured, Colin", he added without conviction (187).

The Superior's personal example is even more powerful an influence on Querry than his words: verba movent, exempla trahunt. And Querry is drawn to reconsider his whole attitude. He begins to feel he should no longer sit on the fence:

> "I suppose belief is a kind of vocation and most men haven't room in their brains or hearts for two vocations. If we really believe in something we have no choice, have we, but to go further" (188).

These are some of the last words Querry spoke to the doctor before Rycker, who suspected Querry of committing adultery with his wife, shot him dead. They are followed by a feeling of remorse for not withstanding the temptations of popular success which in turn engendered a lothing for popular praise.

(186) Ibid. p.103.
(187) Ibid. p.104.
(188) Ibid. pp. 247-248.

That "disgust" is finally expelled from Querry's system and in the leper colony he begins to experience real peace. He had "gone further" to the point where all vocations meet.

The dénouement of the "plot" is indicated by Doctor Colin when he told the Superior after Querry's death that Querry had been cured because "He'd learned to serve other people, you see, and to laugh". The Superior thought the doctor might have suggested that Querry had rediscovered his Christian faith, to which the doctor replied:

> "Oh no, not that. Only a reason for living. You try too hard to make a pattern, father" (189).

The doctor does not profess to know the "pattern". The Superior keeps the "pattern" always in mind, but he remembers what Pascal, in imitation of St. Augustine, said:"A man who starts looking for God has already found him", and applies the same to love. The doctor retorts that Querry was inclined to confine his search to a woman's bed. The priest remarks: "It's not so bad a place to look for it. There are a lot of people who only find hate there" (190).

A Burnt-Out Case is a metaphysical parable to illustrate that man discovers his real self and God only through fraternal love. Salvation, in the ultimate Christian sense of the word, hinges upon this openness to other people, just as scientific

(189) Ibid. p.255.
(190) Ibid. p.255.

advance hinges upon openness to the world of things. In Christ, the God-Man, religion and science should find reconciliation and explicit purpose, Many are the scientists who disclaim all connexion with Christianity and the Church, but if they really seek the truth and are genuinely concerned with people, they are instruments of the world's redemption in Christ; they are, in the modern terminology, "Christians Anonymous" who are not without the Grace of God, as Rahner states.

.....

Except for Fathers Clay and Thomas, the priests described in The Heart of the Matter, The End of the Affair, and A Burnt-Out Case are normal priests who do not suffer the crises tormenting other priests in Greene's writings. It may not be without significance that the former are all religious living under vows of obedience and mostly within a community. In the history of the Church the religious community life has been constantly extolled as a powerful means for the development of the life of grace and even of culture. On the other hand, the most uncongenial priests described by Greene are also members of religious communities. Grace is not forced upon anyone, but missed opportunities take their toll. But one

thing is certain: Greene describes real priests, not caricatures; and among them all, as a model and leader, stands the Superior in A Burnt-Out Case (191).

(191) All the criticisms I have read of this work seem to me very incomplete. I don't think anyone so far has really seized the message of the story in all its dimensions, and nearly all the critics have overlooked the priests. For example: John Atkins, Graham Greene, ed. cit. pp. 245-249; David Pryce-Jones, Graham Greene, ed. cit. pp. 94-97; James Noxon, "Kierkegaard's Stages and 'A Burnt-Out Case' ", Review of English Literature, vol. 3 (1962) pp. 90-101; D.J. Dooley, "A Burnt-Out Case Reconsidered", Wiseman Review, vol. 237 (1963-1964) pp. 168-178; Alice Mayhew, "An Enclosed System where Cosmic Forces Battle", Commonweal (January - June, 1961) pp. 19-20; F.R.Kunkel "The Hollow Man" Renascence (vol. 14, 1961-68) pp. 48-49; A.A. De Vitis Graham Greene, ed. cit., pp. 120-125; etc.

4. THE COMEDIANS

The Comedians, published in 1966, is a story that begins with three very different characters, Browne, Jones, and the Smiths on board the Medea, a Dutch boat with a few passengers on its way to Haiti. Browne is the narrator and protagonist; the Smiths are kind-hearted and somewhat gullible people - "funny, but they are not mocked" - and Jones is a boastful sort of person who defines himself in the words:

"I'm an awful liar, old man" (192).

He is a miles gloriosus utterly lacking in genuineness.

Life on board brings the few passengers together quite soon and after a few pages of the story we know them well. By the time they reach their destination they are well aware of what to expect from the customs officials, and once on the island each one pursues his accustomed activities: Browne his life of adultery, the Smiths their dream of draining out the bitterness of men through vegetarianism; Jones - "the colonel" - his constant lying, turning guerilla, and opting to die heroically.

The title is already a satire, because the comedians are not the humanity-loving Smiths, however laughable; they are all those characters of the story whose life is not authentic. Luis, the ambassador husband of Martha - Browne's chief mistress - says so clearly:

(192) Graham Greene, The Comedians (London: The Bodley Head, 1966), p.287.

> "Come on, cheer up, let us all be comedians together... We mustn't complain too much of being comedians - it's an honourable profession. If only we could be good ones the world might gain at least a sense of style. We have failed - that's all. We are bad comedians, we aren't bad men" (193).

The most unauthentic character is Browne, a Roman Catholic, the bastard son of the Comtesse de Lascot-Villiers, a high-class prostitute (194); a man whose life is an endless chain of sin. He was educated by the Jesuits at the College of The Visitation at Monte Carlo in the hope that he "would prove in time to have a vocation" (195). Having lost his virginity "inexpertly and unexpectedly in a bedroom of the Hotel de Paris" (196) he spends his life going from one job to another, living adulterously with Martha and other women (197). But from the beginning to the end of the story we sense the grace of God pursuing him all the more doggedly the more deeply he plunges into the mire. Browne himself says:

> "When I was a boy I had faith in the Christian God. Life under his shadow was a very serious affair; I saw Him incarnated in every tragedy. He belonged to the lacrimae rerum like a gigantic figure looking through a Scottish mist. Now that I approached the end of life it was only my sense of humour that enabled me sometimes to believe in Him. Life was a comedy, not the tragedy for which I had been prepared, and it seemed to me that we were all, on this boat with a Greek name (why should a Dutch line name its boat in Greek?), driven by an authoritative practical joker towards the extreme point of comedy (198).

(193) Ibid. pp. 145-146.
(194) Ibid. p.64.
(195) Ibid. p.64.
(196) Ibid. p.66.
(197) Ibid. pp. 93-94, 95, 97, 151, 244, 268, etc.
(198) Ibid. p.34.

When Browne believes in God he thinks that life is a tragedy. Now, half-way through, he doubts his faith and thinks life is a comedy. But grace does not forsake him. He has a dream in which he seems himself "dressed like an altar-boy". When he awoke, his mother was dead (199). In another dream he finds himself kneeling down at the Communion rail in the college chapel at Monte Carlo, but as a public sinner he is refused the Sacrament (200). In his study he picks up a brass coffin marked R. I. P. (201).

He is a wanderer lost in a vacuum (202). Martha calls him a prêtre manqué (203).

In a third mysterious dream connected with his faith he "had the sense of an impersonal wound, like a dog dead on an arterial road" (204). In another he drives a car across a river. He is on the road to death (205). Martha's child - symbolically called Angel - sometimes prevents him from sinning (206), and Browne notices that the child does not want to see him beside his mother. Dr. Magiot before being executed writes a letter to Browne in which he says among other things:

> "If you have abandoned one Faith, do not abandon all faith" (207).

In a fifth dream Browne sees Jones: "He lay among the dry rocks... just look at these bloody rocks" (208). Jones

(199) Ibid. p.80.
(200) Ibid. p.225.
(201) Ibid. p.225
(202) Ibid. pp. 242-243.
(203) Ibid. p.245.
(204) Ibid. p.245.
(205) Ibid. p.292.
(206) Ibid. p.97.
(207) Ibid. p.312.
(208) Ibid. pp. 312-313.

has chosen a heroic death.

Browne complains several times of this remorse of conscience which makes him restless:

> "In the school chapel at Monte Carlo we prayed every Sunday: Dona nobis pacem, but I doubt whether that prayer was answered for many in the life that followed. Mr. Smith had no need to pray for peace. He had been born with peace in his heart instead of the splinter of ice" (209).

On one occasion he complains of the Fathers of the Visitation College in these bitter words:

> "I dare say it eased the never quiet conscience which had been injected into me without my consent, when I was too young to know, by the Fathers of the Visitation" (210).

Throughout the story grace is always at Browne's heels to try and convince him that life is not a comedy but rather a tragedy under the direction of God, as he believed once. Jones's heroic death confirms this idea. And also the priest's sermon (211) at the Mass celebrated for the dead guerilla soldiers is an invitation to die if this is necessary to fulfil one's duties in life. In tragedy the hero dies.

In this novel Greene lashes out against mediocrity and spinelessness. "Catholics and Communists have committed great crimes, but at least they have not stood aside, like an established society, and been indifferent" (212). And the

(209) Ibid. p.268.
(210) Ibid. p.304.
(211) In the story another priest appears presiding over a Voodoo ceremony (p.194) - "The Archbishop in exile, the Papal Nuncio in Rome" (p.192).
(212) Th.C., pp.311-312.

priest in his sermon, a Haitian refugee, also takes up the cudgels against indifferentism by commenting on the words of St. Thomas the Apostle: "Let us go up to Jerusalem and die with him":

> "The Church is in the world, it is part of the suffering in the world, and though Christ condemned the disciple who struck off the ear of the high priest's servant, our hearts go out in sympathy to all who are moved to violence by the suffering of others. The Church condemns violence, but it condemns indifference more harshly. Violence can be the expression of love, indifference never. One is an imperfection of charity, the other the perfection of egoism. In the days of fear, doubt and confusion, the simplicity and loyalty of one apostle advocated a political solution. He was wrong, but I would rather be wrong with St. Thomas than right with the cold and craven. Let us go up to Jerusalem and die with him" (213).

Of the three sermons preached by priests and related in Greene's novels (214) this is the shortest, but like the other two, contains the dénouement of the whole story: here it is that life is a tragedy because we all have to die; indifference is reproachable; the political system of Haiti and Santo Domingo (215) should be overthrown (216).

(213) Ibid. pp.308-309.
(214) The sermon of the whisky priest in The Power and the Glory (pp.85-87) and of the Superior in A Burnt-Out Case (pp. 100-3).
(215) The priest is a member of the guerillas. Greene visited the Argentine recently and praised the priests of the Third World Movement. They are doing "great work", he said. The Tablet (11 April, 1970), p.366.
(216) In an introductory letter Greene writes: "Only in Santo Domingo have things changed since I began this book - for the worse". Th.C., p.6.

Greene's "Catholic" novels have been defined as those in which "most of the chief characters are Catholics, and Catholicism is an essential element of the plot" (217); and this applies to a certain degree to The Comedians seeing that the problem of Browne's faith underlies a great deal of the story and the characters are mostly Catholics. But the political element is also an essential part, and Greene comes across as a writer who is both political-minded and Catholic (or shall we say, Christian)-minded. In the whole range of his writings up to date only five novels and two plays can be classified as "Catholic" works. Two of his earliest works, The Name of Action and The Rumour at Nightfall deal with political situations.

We might call The Comedians a politico-religious novel because of the author's constant reference to politics and because the "pursuit" theme in the religious sense pervades it as it pervades, in some form or other, all Greene's works whether he calls them novels, entertainments, travel books, etc. Greene is a Catholic humanist who begs his readers in the prologue of The Comedians not to identify him with Browne, but we are not forbidden to think of him when we read what Dr. Magiot writes to Browne:

> "There is a mystique as well as a politique. We are humanists, you and I" (218).

(217) F.L.Kunkel, The Labyrinthine Ways of Graham Greene, ed. cit. p.101.
(218) The Comedians, p.311.

NOTE

In 1969 there appeared a book by Graham Greene called Travels with my Aunt, a collection of anecdotes and tales of a humorous character. Aunt Augusta meets her nephew for the first time at a funeral, Augusta's sister's, and they entertain each other during an excursion around the world, exchanging experiences. There is little or no theological dimension to the book, but a number of priests are mentioned. One priest in particular, a parish priest of Corrientes in the Argentine, is "a fat old priest with rogue eyes who looked rather like Winston Churchill" (p.251) and whose credulity is in contrast with the common-sense of most of Greene's priest characters elsewhere. He maintains the divine origin of flying-saucers! (p.232). This book has little interest for my study.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE AND GREENE'S PRIESTS

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Charles Moëller calls the work of Graham Greene "le martyre de l'espérance", the martyrdom of hope (1). And indeed, ever since Brighton Rock appeared in 1938, Greene's theology, especially as expressed by his priestly characters, is a theology of grace and hope.

Hope is of the very essence of Greene's theology, so it is not surprising that his priests should emphasize divine grace, one of the main objects of hope, fraternal charity, God's boundless mercy, reverence for the individual conscience, the incessant struggle between good and evil, and the unsearchable ways by which God enables man to find salvation.

When Greene published his "Catholic" works the doctrine of hope occupied a secondary place in theology and theological problems as a whole were not closely linked with Christian hope. Moreover, there prevailed a certain pessimist outlook regarding the number of those who were saved. This pessimism entered the mainstream of modern literature based on existentialist philosophy and with the rejection of God and the supernatural came to glorify despair under such headings as "the

(1) Charles Moëller, Littérature du XXe siècle et christianisme (Tournai, Paris: Casterman, 1954), vol. 1, p.259.

tragic sense of life", "nausea", or "the absurd".

In this chapter I wish to gather a few testimonies setting forth the following points:

> the modern theology of hope,
>
> the doctrine of despair in modern literature,
>
> and the value of Graham Greene's theological and literary contribution to the dilemma of hope v. despair.

1. The Modern Theology of Hope

1. From the time of St. Thomas Aquinas (2), hope has been studied by both dogmatic and moral theology within the framework of the individual's relationships with God (3):

> It is elevation of the will, made possible by grace, by which man expects eternal life and the means to attain it, confident of the omnipotent aid of God. Hope is the great virtue of man in his status viatoris (4).

It is directed to a future good which is hard but not impossible to attain, and is the only true response to the insecurity of human existence passing through the "not-yet" phase (5).

Hope is enlightened as to its goal only by faith, and

(2) St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, qq. 17-22.
(3) Sacrae Theologiae Summa, (Matriti: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1946), vol. 3, pp. 818-835.
(4) Karl Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi (London: Burns and Oates, 1969) vol. 3. p.61.
(5) Heinrich Fries, Conceptos Fundamentales de la Teología, Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1966), p.22.

death - which obsesses the existentialists - is its supreme menace and its supreme test.

Thus presented, hope is severed from the Gospel message and is not seen to be Christocentrically rooted. Even the eschatological treatises have failed to take their bearings from Christian hope, and therefore, the great biblical promises have been interpreted in an excessively individualistic fashion. The fundamental and all-embracing importance of hope has been ignored. Hence the role of hope in the workaday world has been left under-developed:

> A better life elsewhere, or a flight from this valley of tears and its tasks. This occasioned the reproach of Karl Marx that religion is the opium of the masses. (6)

Fourteen years ago Hans Urs von Balthasar wrote:

> A structuration of eschatology can be achieved today only in connection with a total overhaul of theology in general, and in connection with our modern outlook on man and the world (7).

Theology, as a consequence of serious study of hope in the Bible, has undergone a transformation. It is now seen that in the Old Testament "Israel's hope was directed to a future in history of which the horizon was constantly broadening", and in the New Testament, hope is the sustaining power of the tension between the experience of the present and the salvation

(6) K. Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, ed.cit. p.61.
(7) Johannes Feiner, Josef Trüstsch, and Franz Böckle, Panorama de la Teologia Actual (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1961), p.513.

believed in. Grounded on biblical theology, modern theologians are building up a dogmatic theology entirely centred upon hope, and this is

> the most interesting theological movement to emerge from Europe since the demise of Barthianism, Bultmann's "demythologizing", and the endless arguments between exponents of the two schools (8).

For these new theologians the basis and centre of the Christian Faith - and hence of Christian theology - is Jesus' message and his promises, and his being raised by God from the dead.

The best-known theologian of hope is the Protestant from Germany, Jürgen Moltmann whose Theology of Hope has been unanimously accepted (9). According to Moltmann, all theology is discussion of how the resurrection and future of Christ affect us:

> From first to last, and not merely in the epilogue, Christianity is eschatology, is hope, forward looking and forward moving, and therefore also revolutionizing and transforming the present. The eschatological is not one element of Christianity, but it is the medium of Christian Faith as such, the key in which everything in it is set, the glow that suffuses everything here in the dawn of an expected new day. For Christian Faith lives from the raising of the crucified Christ, and strains after the promises of the universal future of Christ. Eschatology is the passionate suffering and passionate longing kindled by the Messiah. Hence eschatology cannot really be only a part of Christian doctrine. Rather, the eschatological outlook is characteristic of all Christian proclamation, of every Christian

(8) Harvey Cox, The Feast of the Fools (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969), p.126.
(9) Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (London: SCM Press, 1969).

> existence and of the whole Church. There is therefore only one real problem in Christian theology, which its own object forces upon it and which it in turn forces on mankind and on human thought: the problem of the future... The God spoken of here is no intra-worldly or extra-worldly God, but the "God of hope" (Romans 15:13), a God with "future as his essential nature" (as E. Bloch puts it), as made known in Exodus and in Israelite prophecy, the God whom we therefore cannot really have in us or over us but always only before us, who encounters us in his promises for the future, and whom we therefore cannot "have" either, but can only await in active hope. A proper theology would therefore have to be constructed in the light of its future goal. Eschatology should not be its end, but its beginning (10).

This long quotation from Moltmann is justified for an understanding of hope. The axiom of Anselm of Canterbury: fides quaerens intellectum - credo ut intelligam that has governed theology ever since the Middle Ages should, according to Moltmann, be changed for: spes quaerens intellectum - spero ut intelligam, if we wish to understand or perhaps save from shipwreck Christian theology (11). Until now theology has been one of faith and love; the present-day world and the essence of the Christian message require a theology of hope.

In the view of all these modern theologians, "it is hope that maintains and upholds faith and keeps it moving. The hope that is continually led on further by the promise of God reveals all thinking in history to be eschatologically oriented and eschatologically stamped as provisional" (12). This means that

(10) Ibid. p.16.
(11) Ibid. p.33.
(12) Ibid. p.33.

the whole history is stamped by hope, the hope of salvation. This hope launches the Christian out into thought and life (13). The Christian cannot consider his future as something purely supra-worldly and spiritual in character, but that his definitive future is already in the making throughout history. The Christian is the one most obliged to channel all his efforts into changing this into a better world and to bring about a new creation of all things (14). He has nothing to do "with fleeing the world, with resignation and escapism" (15), because "he sees in the resurrection of Christ not the eternity of heaven, but the future of the very earth on which his cross stands. It sees in him the future of the very humanity for which he died. That is why it finds the cross the hope of the earth" (16). Consequently this theology is capable of raising hope from the private individual sphere to a community dimension of Church and mankind as a whole without diminishing its personal element.

Christian hope is essentially realistic. The Christian does not deny that evil exists in the world, on the contrary; he is aware that life is a continuous struggle between present reality and hope, between the cross and the resurrection, between grace and sin, between god and evil (17). He knows that,

(13) Ibid. p.33.
(14) Ibid. p.33.
(15) Ibid. p.21.
(16) Ibid. p.21.
(17) Ibid. p.18. And Herbert Vorgrimler, editor, Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), vol. 5, p.156.

precisely because he has hope, he will live always at odds with the world. Because he lives in a continual endeavour to reform things as they are at present, as far as possible, "hope does not mean that the promise will be fulfilled without trouble and suffering, for the resurrection only follows crucifixion" (18). He knows that this world is not the heaven of self-realization nor the hell of self-estrangement. He knows that the world is not finished, but is understood as engaged in a history. Therefore a Christian "may be neither optimistic nor pessimistic, but he must be hopeful" (19).

Hope is eminently dynamic. Knowing that "nothing has yet come to an end, but everything is still full of possibilities" (20), the Christian feels he must do his best to hasten forward the object of his hope: "it gives him a responsibility for the world and its future - a future from which we can too often isolate ourselves in forms of presumption and despair" (21).

Johannes B. Metz discourses at length about "a creative and militant eschatology". For him "the theology of the world must be a political theology", inasmuch as the Jerusalem to-

wards which a Christian travels

> does not lie ahead of us as a distant and hidden goal, which only needs to be revealed. The eschatological City of God is <u>now</u> coming into existence, for our hopeful approach builds this City. We are workers building this future, and not just interpreters of this future (22).

(18) Andrew M.Greeley, <u>A Future to Hope in</u> (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1970). p.235.
(19) Ibid. p.231.
(20) J. Moltmann, op. cit. p.25.
(21) Johannes B. Metz, <u>Theology of the World</u> (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), p.93.
(22) Ibid. p.94.

Christian hope is the driving force of all inner-worldly aspirations, which are penetrated and carried on beyond the scope of their own powers in reliance on the mercy and omnipotence of God (23).

The upshot of this is that a Christian may not sit on the fence with regard to political problems. If life in the world cannot be divorced from the Christian life, if the Christian is urged on by his hope to improve the world, he cannot wash his hands of politics. For, as E. Schillebeeckx writes:

> It stresses that the Christian message concerns man as a whole, also in his personal relationships, whether private or public, and in his labours to make this earth more habitable and worthy of man (24).

And J.B. Metz also calls for a "creative eschatology" which will be conscious of the social and political responsibilities which flow from the universality of the promises.

Hope is the only thing that can save modern man. Metz is right in giving one of his books the title "Theology of the World" after Moltmann had written his masterpiece "Theology of Hope" which provides the basis for the former. Besides, modern man is creating a philosophy of hope:

> Philosophy, which is man's reflective sifting of the spirit of the age, has therefore already begun to discuss the primacy of the future and a culture

(23) K. Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, ed. cit. vol. 3, p.65.
(24) Edward Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), p.144.

> characterized by planning a better future for all mankind - the "principle of hope" (25).

The Marxist philosophy is one of hope. E.Bloch in his book Das Prinzip Hoffnung (1954) made the first attempt, in the history of Marxism, to conceptualize the future of our culture. Kierkegaard said that man's "passion is for the possible". There is no doubt that modern ideologies are trained on the future:

> The modern man's understanding of the world is fundamentally oriented toward the future. His mentality therefore is not primarily contemplative but operative (26).

In his conversations with Marxists, Metz argues that Christianity should be seen as "the religion of the absolute future" and that it posits a world that is more radically open to human domination than a world moved by the inexorable logic of a Marxist dialectic. Fortunately theologians have understood the need for a theology of hope for the modern world, and they are actually constructing it. Thus Moltmann, Metz, Gerhard Sauter, Pannemberg, Cox, Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, and others.

A Christian deeply imbued with this hope "must be filled with life, trust and true youthfulness" (27). Hope thrives in the midst of endless contradiction. Calvin wrote:

(25) E. Schillebeeckx, op. cit. pp.179-180.
(26) J.B. Metz, op. cit. p.83.
(27) H. Fries, Faith under Challenge (London: Burns and Oates, 1969) p.109.

> We hear of ineffable blessedness, but meantime we are oppressed by infinite misery. We are promised abundance of all good things - yet we are rich only in hunger and thirst.

But, as Moltmann correctly observes:

> It is in this contradiction that hope must prove its power.

The Christian has to witness the ceaseless struggle between good and evil as long as this world lasts, but he knows that good, that is hope, has the last word. And hope has a much wider field than we suspect. Schillebeeckx writes:

> This existential trust can be discovered, though only implicitly, even in the writings of those philosophers - like Albert Camus, for example - who describe life as absurd. What must be investigated are the implications of the fact that there are people - whether believers or not - who have definitely opted for goodness and who therefore affirm that they regard human life as ultimately meaningful; people who, in spite of everything and above all in spite of man himself refuse to be shaken in their conviction that it is not evil but goodness which has the last word (28).

2. So far we have spoken of the theology of hope as applied to the salvation and transformation of humanity in general and this material word, but this presupposes a personal and individual transformation as "the ultimate goodness and meaningfulness of a person's unique existence". In the past there has been a lot of discussion about the number of those who are saved as

(28) E. Schillebeeckx, op. cit. p.74. See also Iris. Murdoch, The Sovereignity of Good (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp. 77-104.

compared with the number of those who incur eternal damnation. In the Gospels there are some frightening sayings attributed to Jesus Christ whose interpretation has lent itself to a prediction fraught with woe:

> Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many (Matt. 6:13).
>
> many are called, but few are chosen (Matt. 22:14).

From this - and from a gloomy view of the way most people live - the classical theologians concluded that the majority of men were heading for damnation (29). Slightly more optimistic was Suárez who thought that most Catholics would be saved (30), and Lugo who ventured to predict salvation for a good number of non-christians (31). They follow the footsteps of St. Thomas Aquinas who, after saying that only God knows how many are saved (32), adds that the saved are outnumbered by the damned (33).

Modern theologians are not happy with these opinions - the Church has never defined anything on the matter except that hell does exist and damnation is possible - and are trying to overhaul

(29) Tanquerey, Synopsis Theol. Dogmatiae (Paris: Desclée, 1953) vol. 2, pp. 325-327.
(30) F. Suárez, De Predestinatione, lib. 7, chap. 3.
(31) Lugo, De Fide, Disput. 12, sect. 5, nn.50-51.
(32) St. Thomas: Summa Theol. I, q.23, art.7.
(33) "Pauciores sunt qui salvantur" (Ibid.).

– the very foundations of the theology of hope concerning individual salvation. They base their conclusions full of hope and optimism on a deeper insight into the radical meaning of the Incarnation and the role of Christ as universal Redeemer and King. They are also more cautious and humble in their approach to a Mystery which the above-quoted words of Scripture do not throw much light upon except as a warning that no man can play fast and loose with God's merciful invitation to enter the Kingdom and think himself immune to God's rejection. The words are similar to those that Christ used when he admonished people that because he had lived in their midst or because they were sons of Abraham according to natural descent they had no privileged title to the blessings of the Kingdom that he came to inaugurate.

It is interesting to compare the concluding lines of the article on Predestination as given in the first edition of 1911 of The Catholic Encyclopedia with those of the corresponding article in the New Catholic Encyclopedia of 1967. Here I quote from the latter:

> The sincere unambiguous salvific will of God appears, indeed, forcefully in the Gospels; recall the widow seeking the lost drachma, the father and his prodigal son, and the Good Shepherd leaving the 99 sheep in the desert in order to find the one that is lost (Luke 15: 1-32). Only Christ, who is one with the Father, can narrate what attitude of mind the Father has toward men, and from the above examples it is evident that it is one of infinite love and mercy. (34)

(34) New Catholic Encyclopaedia (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1967), vol. II, p.719.

Another theological encyclopedia, Sacramentum Mundi, edited recently by Karl Rahner and other eminent theologians, is totally oriented by a firm hope. In it Karl Rahner writes:

> The best representatives of modern Thomism consider that this perspective on the problem should be abandoned. For God is not in time. His transcendence places him in an eternity which has neither past nor future, but only an eternal present, though even this concept is inadequate (35).

Karl Barth, of the Protestant tradition, defends an optimistic stand opposed to Calvin (36). When dealing with grace, Klaus Berger, Johann Auer, and Karl Rahner are equally committed to the view that "Scripture commands man to hope for himself and for all, but forbids the certainty which would supersede 'mere' hope" (37). But this hope is rooted in God's promises:

> The Kingdom of God which he announced is awaited in faith and hope, not as the consequence of the laws of nature but as the free, historical intervention of God (38).

J. Ratzinger is quoted by K. Rahner when the latter writes:

> "Hence it cannot be the task of theology to go into details about the supposed facts of the next life, such as the number of the damned, the severity of their pains, and so on".

and he adds:

> Even in his judgement-discourses Jesus gave no

(35) K. Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, ed. cit. vol. 5, p.89.
(36) Ibid. p.90.
(37) Ibid. pp.406-407.
(38) Ibid. p.131.

> clear revelation about whether men are actually lost or how many they may be. That he restricts himself to the possibility follows from the real nature of these discourses, which is to be a summons to decision (39).

Therefore while maintaining the possibility of eternal loss we must also maintain God's universal salvific will, the universal scope of Redemption offered by Christ, and the duty of all men to hope and pray for salvation. And as regards the fate of those who depart from this life without baptism or conscious belief or explicit desire to do the will of God, the tendency of modern theology is away from the idea of a "Limbo" of merely natural beatitude and appeals

> in particular to the dogma of God's universal salvific will, to the unity and solidarity of the human race which as such was called to the supernatural and redeemed by Christ, as well as to the possibility of a special kind of baptism of desire, which would make it possible for those persons to enter into relation with Christ and his Church (40).

Hence Metz discerns an effort on the part of theologians to recognize faith beneath the appearances of unbelief; Rahner often speaks of the "anonymous Christian"; and Hans Küng reminds us that the line between belief and unbelief runs through the hearts of us all.

3. This re-orientation in dogmatic theology is having a

(39) Ibid. vol. 3. p.8.
(40) Ibid. p.318.

profound influence on moral theology. Getting away from a casuistry preoccupied with labelling specific actions as mortally or venially sinful or not sinful, the moralists of today are insisting that "man's personality is the foundation of his morality" (41). They are also enlisting the co-operation of lay people whose insights are needed to enable moral theology to "make close contact with real contemporary life" (42), a theology distinguished by its

> flexibility and fidelity in regard to the living God, the Lord of history. Hence, fundamental ideas such as readiness for change, growth, constant conversion, renewal, reform of structures, reconciliation, courage to take risks, will receive a new tone and emphasis and find a new place in the whole (43)

We need a moral theology that can "promote dialogue and serve in the conduct of life in a pluralist Christendom and the world", that stresses what unites Christians rather than what divides them.

> The decisive perspective of the moral theology of today and tomorrow is no longer the confessor and confession alone, but the Christian as such, the people of God on pilgrimage, striving for maturity and solidarity (44).

And the only theology, both dogmatic and moral, is one that is built up on hope for mankind and for each individual.

(41) J. Feiner, J. Trütsch, and F. Böckle, Panorama de la Teología Actual (Madrid: Ediciones Guadarrama, 1961), p.525.
(42) K. Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, ed. cit. vol. 4, p.127.
(43) Ibid. p.26.
(44) Ibid. p.125.

2. The Doctrine of Despair in modern literature (45)

Hope has two enemies: presumption and despair. German idealism at the beginning of the nineteenth century fostered presumption, but the mid 20th century existentialist literature is riddled with despair. If on the one hand human beings fall into the trap of aspiring to be "like gods", on the other hand they drift into hopelessness, melancholy, and bitterness:

> From this arise the tristesse and frustration which fill all living things with the seeds of a sweet decay (46).

Existentialists reject all hope under the pretext of remaining on the solid ground of reality; they want "to think clearly and not hope any more"; they reckon that "hope as a rule makes many a fool". They fail to realize that

> hope alone is to be called "realistic", because it alone takes seriously the possibilities with which all reality is fraught (47).

Hope enables one to go beyond present appearances and to see things in continual progression towards the attainment of their countless possibilities, whereas "the despairing surrender of hope does not even need to have a desperate appearance. It can also be the mere tacit absence of meaning, prospects, future

(45) I do not wish to deny the many positive values inherent in much of existentialist writing, but I am concerned to challenge the note of despair that frequently sounds as if creation were utterly meaningless and man a mere puppet on strings.
(46) J. Moltmann, op. cit. p.22.
(47) Ibid. p.25.

and purpose. It can wear the face of smiling resignation: Bonjour tristess! " (48). Hence, for the existentialists of the Sartre, Camus, etc. school of thought, life is but tragedy, nausea, or an absurdity.

1. Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) (49) is one of the leading philosophers in the Spanish-speaking world whose passionate protest against the de-humanized and abstract philosophy and theology of his day, a protest given lively, restless, strident, and aphoristic expression in essays, novels, plays, and poetry, aroused the enthusiasm of young people who shared his preoccupations (50). "My Religion", "The Christ of Valázquez", "The Tragic Sense of Life", "The Agony of Christianity", and many other writings evince a tremendous obsession with religion (51). Kirkegaard was his guide and philosopher. In some ways he was the forerunner of linguistic positivism - "Language is the main tool of knowledge" (52). For Unamuno truth is merely subjective - "One never dreams twice the same dream"; the individual

(48) Ibid. p.24.
(49) Unamuno's difficult style and love of paradox makes translation of his works a rare achievement; hence outside Spain and Spanish speaking peoples his influence has not been so great as Sartres' and Camus'.
(50) José Huertas-Jourda hails Unamuno as "the greatest Don Miguel since Cervantes": The existentialism of Unamuno (Gainsville, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1963) p.2.
(51) P. Felix Garcia, in Miguel de Unamuno, Diario Intimo (Madrid: Escelicer, 1970), p.XIV.
(52) José Huertas-Jourda, op. cit. p.5.

human being is the focal point of philosophy. The idea of God worries him profoundly. Tragic sense and Agony in Unamuno correspond to nausea and absurdity of Sartre and Albert Camus, but unlike them, he clings passionately to the Person of Christ and Salvation in Christ, however variously he interprets Salvation. "El Cristo de Velázquez" is one of the highlights of Spanish lyrical poetry and perhaps the best religious poem of this century in Spanish. It was in poetry that Unamuno expressed his deepest self and his passionate yearnings.

Unamuno was a bundle of contradictions. Whereas in "El Cristo de Velázquez" he shows an amazing depth of faith in Christ and even in the Catholic Church, elsewhere he often lapses into denials of basic Christian doctrines. He has an unquenchable thirst for a life after this, for the perduration of his human personality, and yet he can write:

> What we call soul is nothing more than a word to designate the individual conscience in its entirety and perdurance; but that it changes and integrates as readily as it disintegrates is evident (53).

And with all his expressions of worship of God, he can also say:

> Does God exist?.. Is he something substantial outside our consciousness, outside our yearning? This is something insoluble, but it had better be (54).

(53) Miguel de Unamuno, Obras Completas (Barcelona: Vergara, 1958) vol. 16. p.207.
(54) Ibid.pp. 295, 312.

But he dismisses all rational speculation about God:

> The idea of God of so-called rational theodicy is pure hypothesis, like, for example, the idea of ether (55).

Like Sartre and Camus, Unamuno was tormented by the existence of human pain, of evil, of hell, of free will (56).

> To be, to be for ever, to be without end! Thirst to be, to be more! Hunger for God! Thirst for eternilizing and eternal love! To be for ever! To be God! (57)

2. Jean-Paul Sartre (born 1905) is the most popular exponent of existentialist thought, perhaps because the object of his philosophy is the human being, human existence. He "shuns the abstract as much as he possibly can and tries to remain glued to the real" (58). He is directly and almost exclusively concerned with the man in the flesh here and now. For him existence precedes essence. Another factor making for his popularity is the literary form he uses; like Camus and Unamuno he expresses his ideas through the medium of novels and plays.

This is not the place to analyse the details of Sartre's philosophy; I merely wish to single out certain points bearing upon hope, or rather the denial of all hope. The idea of consciousness is paramount in his philosophy, but consciousness

(55) Ibid. pp. 261 etc. 370 and foll.
(55) Ibid. p. 295.
(57) Ibid. p.167.
(58) René Lafarge, Jean-Paul Sartre: His Philosophy (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1970), p.2.

he identifies with nothingness, with freedom, and this consciousness of freedom leads him to an anguish that pervades all his thinking. When man confronts being and its contingency he feels nausea, he is seized with anguish, and would prefer not to dwell on such a limited existence as his:

> But if I am what I wish to veil, the question takes on quite another aspect. I can in fact wish "not to see" a certain aspect of my being only if I am acquainted with the aspect which I do not wish to see. This means that in my being I must indicate this aspect in order to be able to turn myself away from it; better yet, I must think of it constantly in order to take care not to think of it (59).

Man would like to oppose his existence to the absolute being, but then he discovers he is nothing:

> I am nothing; I possess nothing. As inseparable from the world as light, and yet exiled, gliding like light over the surface of stones and water, but nothing can ever grasp me nor absorb me. Outside the world, outside the past, outside myself: freedom is exile, and I am condemned to be free (60).

Sartre would like to make man autonomous, self-subsistent, boundless, like God, but his philosophy is powerless in view of man's evident nothingness. In spite of this powerlessness, however, man creates all values. In The Age of Reason Mathieu says: "Whatever happens, it is by my agency that everything must happen" (61).

(59) Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness (Northampton: John Dickens, 1969), p.43. Original French edition: 1943, L'Etre et le néant.
(60) Jean-Paul Sartre, The Reprieve (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970), p.308. Original French edition: 1045, Le Sursis.
(61) J.P. Sartre, The Age of Reason (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), p.289. French edition: L'Age de Raison, 1945.

The ontology propounded by Sartre excludes the absolute: "God is dead even in the heart of believers". And in Nausea Antoine Roquentin discovers the existence of things "in the middle of a clump of laurel bushes", but at the same time discovers that everything is absurd:

> existence had suddenly unveiled itself... All those objects... how can I explain? They embarrassed me; I would have liked them to exist less strongly... We were a heap of existents inconvenienced, embarrassed by ourselves, we hadn't the slight-est reason for being there, any of us; each existent, embarrassed, vaguely ill at ease, felt superfluous in relation to others.(62)

The conclusion he draws is that everything is absurd and that anguish is "a permanent structure of the human being", "Nausea", "naeseas", "nausea of the Rendez-vous" (63), he repeats time and time again. Sartre wanted to devote his great talent to the service of men, but he failed because he rejected God and therefore rejected truth. He wanted to rescue man but he condemned him. Sartre's philosophy has no place for hope.

3. Albert Camus (1913-1960) interests us here only in his attitude towards hope.

Camus thinks we cannot rid ourselves of the feeling of absurdity because everything is penetrated by the absurd. In The Myth of Sisyphus (64) he gives a long dissertation on the

(62) J.P. Sartre, Nausea (Harmondsworth, Mddx: Penguin Books, 1970), pp.183-184. Original French edition 1938 La Nausée.
(63) Ibid. p.176.
(64) Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955); original French edition "Le Mythe de Sisyphe", 1942.

origin and factors of the absurd throughout man's life, and in The Rebel he returns to the same theme (65). The world is an absurdity:

> Meanwhile, we can sum up the initial progress that the spirit of rebellion accomplishes in a process of thought that is already convinced of the absurdity and apparent sterility of the world (66).

The whole earth is in the hands of a power devoid of principle (67), and the Rebel tries to overcome this absurdity by looking for values outside religion and the traditional absolute values (68). Camus is deeply aware of the value of religion, as he shows in the second sermon preached by Father Panelouse in The Plague (69).

In his novel The Outsider (70) - "a parable in illustration of the philosophy of the absurd" (71) - one of the characters, Meusault, describes the monotony of life as exemplified on a Sunday morning with emphasis on "emptied streets", "the sky clouded over"... Life is an absurdity and our experience of the absurd leads us to freedom (72).

(65) A. Camus, The Rebel (Harmondsworth, Mddx., 1969). Original French edition "L'Homme Révolté", pub. by Gallimard, Paris, 1951.
(66) A. Camus, The Rebel, ed. cit. p.28.
(67) Ibid. p.117.
(68) Ibid. p.27.
(69) The Collected Fiction of Albert Camus (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970), pp.198-203. La Peste was first published in 1947 (Paris: Gallimard).
(70) L'Etranger (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).
(71) Robert de Luppé, Albert Camus (London: The Merlin Press, 1966), p.41. The type of parable is more like Greene's than Kafka's.
(72) The Collected Fiction of A. Camus, ed. cit. p.13.

Evil surrounds us everywhere, and rebellion is the tension between goodand evil. The Rebel struggles against the evil of the world and will continue to do so as long as man remains in the world; but evil and suffering will always have the last word:

> Rebellion indefatigably confronts evil, from which it can only derive a new impetus. Man can master, in himself, everything that can be rectified. And after he has done so, children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society. Even by his greatest effort man can only propose to diminish, arithmetically, the sufferings of the world. But the injustice and the suffering of the world will remain and, no matter how limited they are, they will not cease to be an outrage (73).

"Evil, therefore, is an ineluctable reality; to believe that it can be abolished is a temptation to use <u>totalitarian</u> means to achieve the triumph of <u>total</u> good; this is a return to evil" (74). Hence hope is impossible, happiness and optimism are not for man:

> The words which reverberate for us at the confines of this long adventure of rebellion are not formulae for optimism, for which we have no possible use in the extremities of our unhappiness, but words of courage and intelligence which on the shores of the eternal seas even have the qualities of virtue (75).

There is an absolute: human nature as such (76), but Camus denies the existence of God. God being dead, one must kill off those moral principles "in which the memory of God is

(73) A. Camus, <u>The Rebel</u>, ed. cit. p.267.
(74) R. de Luppé, op. cit. p.25.
(75) A. Camus, The Rebel, ed. cit. pp.266-267.
(76) Ibid. pp. 12, 28, 110.

still preserved" (77). One must aspire to a godless sanctity:

> "It comes to this, Tarrou said almost casually, "what interests me is learning how to become a saint".
> "But you don't believe in God?"
> "Exactly! Can one be a saint without God? - that's the problem, in fact the only problem I'm up against today" (78).

This possibility is the theme of The Plague (79).

> Between Christian Hope and the secular faith in history, both equally illusory, according to Camus and in his eyes inhuman in the final analysis, is Revolt which is man's generous defense and his solidarity with the humiliated and the suffering (80).

3. Graham Greene's contribution to the dilemma of hope versus despair.

The great merit of Graham Greene is to have pierced the outward appearances of human folly and tragedy and detected behind them the hidden workings of divine grace. As Mauriac says:

> "The importance of Greene to the generation of Sartre and Camus is that to the existentialist claim of universal absurdity he opposes the Mystery of an infinite Love" (81).

Greene did this at a time when moral and dogmatic theology relegated hope to a purely individualistic sphere and when

(77) Ibid. p.105.
(78) A. Camus, The Collected Fiction of Albert Camus, ed. cit. p.219.
(79) Ibid. p.218.
(80) Jean Onimus, Albert Camus and Christianity (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970), p.135.
(81) F. Mauriac, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1950-1956), vol. 7, p.262.

despair was given pride of place in secular literature. Since the publication of Brighton Rock, in 1938, Greene has been a prophetical voice advocating hope of salvation for even the most degraded of human beings, and maintaining that the grace of God is constantly dogging their heels and urging them to repent.

To ignore this supernatural element in the works of Graham Greene is to destroy the theological dimension which gives form and substance to many of his writings. My study of the priests in Graham Greene is only part, but a very significant part, of the general theological context or mould in which Greene creates his works of fiction.

Three of Greene's works are direct exponents of the virtue of Christian Hope: Brighton Rock, The Heart of the Matter, and The Living Room. They deal with what many Christians would regard as the ultimate sin: suicide; but Greene's contention is that even suicide leaves room for the divine Mercy, even though Canon Law forbids ecclesiastical burial and exequies to those who by all outward signs have "deliberato consilio" taken their own lives. In this, Greene distinguishes between the Church as a visible Institution and the Church as the embodiment of Christ's forgiveness, the latter aspect being expressed by "sympathetic" priests.

Of all fictional characters created by Greene, Pinkie is perhaps the most reprobate. He seems to carry Hell inside

himself, and yet the grace of God is ceaselessly prompting him. He often remembers words from the Mass he used to serve as an altar boy (82); children's voices recall his lost innocence (83); Rose symbolizes grace for him because she warns him of sacrilege in making a bad confession before contracting a civil marriage (84); and "he saw himself now as a full-grown man for whom the angels wept" (85). Birds in flight and the thought of Hell urge him to repent; a marble statuette brought him the feeling of "the prowling presence of pity" when he loaded the gun for Rose's suicide (86); etc. All to no avail, it would seem; but towards the end an old priest appears who casts aside human calculations and tells Rose that nobody can suspect "the... appalling... strangeness of the Mercy of God", and begs her to "hope and pray" for Pinkie.

"Hope and pray", "pray and hope" are almost a fixed formula on the lips of Greene's priests. We know the rules, we know God's commandments, but we shall never know this side of the grave the dialogue between God and each individual soul at the moment of final and irrevocable decision when death intervenes. We can only trust, we are commanded by God to trust, that even a suicide will find mercy.

(82) Brighton Rock, ed. cit. pp. 59, 63, et.
(83) Ibid. p.188.
(84) Ibid. p.222.
(85) Ibid. p.225.
(86) Ibid. p.311.

In The Heart of the Matter Scobie is pursued by God's grace prompting him to ask for "peace" (87) and pardon (88) and trust (89). His whole life is filled with remorse and the fear of Hell, but Father Rank plays an important part in saving him from complete despair.

The Living Room speaks of another Rose and of one who commits suicide like Pinkie and Scobie. The conviction that God has mercy on her never leaves her (90), and the priest uncle, Father Browne, symbolizes that divine Presence and that constant hope for mercy (91).

Less direct but still powerful is the apologia for hope in The Power and the Glory. The "whisky priest" is tempted to despair but it never overcomes him; his slightest sins fill him with remorse but do not make him less outspoken in defence of trust in God; and when the moment of his execution arrives he at last recovers calm and confidence (92). Throughout the eight years he spent as a priest on the run he was the minister of hope for his scattered flock, and his prayers were answered: he was succeeded, unexpectedly, by another and younger priest;

(87) The Heart of the Matter, ed. cit. p.66.
(88) Ibid. pp. 130, 142, 143, 227, 265, 275, 308, etc.
(89) Ibid. p. 316.
(90) The Living Room, pp. 35. 36, 49, 62, etc.
(91) Ibid. p. 44, etc.
(92) The Power and the Glory, p.273.

even the lieutenant returns home from the execution full of remorse for what he had done and without zest for persecuting the Church any longer (93).

The End of the Affair goes beyond mere hope of salvation for sinners, it registers the ascent to holiness of a woman who had lived in adultery and who, after leaving the man, began to love him in a new and loftier way. Her diary - Sarah Miles's - is a hymn to God's Mercy and to hope. After her death the atheism of a Mr. Smythe crumbles. Father Crompton, her spiritual guide, confirms her marvellous conversion.

In A Burnt-Out Case we see Querry, a world-famous Belgian architect, embittered after a life of pride and self-complacency, taking refuge in a leper colony where, in the silence of Africa, he witnesses at first hand the meaning of true love for others. He is prompted by grace acting through music, boredom, remorse, and human suffering; he is brought to a sense of values, by the kindness of an atheist doctor and the dedication of Catholic priests and nuns. He is eventually cured of his leprosy of the spirit; he finds hope and salvation.

In The Comedians the protagonist Mr. Browne goes from adultery to adultery and in the process seems to snuff out the flame of the faith he once possessed; but grace pursues him in the oddest ways: by mysterious dreams (94), intolerable remorse, reminiscences of childhood, lack of peace, and employment with an undertaker (95).

.....

(93) Ibid. p.286.
(94) The Comedians, ed. cit. pp. 80, 225, 291, etc.
(95) Ibid. p.310.

If modern theology's task "is to inject this hope into mankind" (96), and if "In creative works of art we see ourselves better and come into touch with just those sources of imagination which should nourish efforts in natural theology..." (97), we may hail several of Graham Greene's writings as a valuable contribution to the dilemma: hope versus despair. "The alternatives are, in reality, either existentialist despair or Christian hope" (98). We cannot afford to ignore this theological dimension of Greene's works even from a literary point of view, just as we cannot ignore the philosophical "tragic sense of life", "the nausea", and "the absurd" in a literary assessment of Unamuno, Sartre, and Camus.

Critics and essayists on Graham Greene's works have by and large ignored his theology or in passing lamented "the blinkers of his religion" (99); hence their lack of depth, and of realism in its basic sense.

Hope is realistic. The Christian looks at history as directed by God's Providence, but does not deny evil in the world. The world until its consummation will ever be the

(96) Heinrich Fries, Faith under Challenge (London: Burns and Oates 1969, p.104.
(97) John A.T. Robinson, The New Reformation? (London: SCM Press, 1965) pp.66-67.
(98) A.J. Greely: A Future to Hope in, ed. cit. p.234.
(99) C.P. Snow, "Novelists of Three Decades" in The Modern Age (The Pelican Guide to English Literature: Harmondsworth, 1967) p.404.

field of wheat and tares and the area for struggle between good and evil. The Church herself is this field and arena. She is the Kingdom of God only "in germ" not in fulfilment: "we must accept the realities of the case: the Church is a Church of sinners" (100); "the Church has a hope and witnesses to a hope, but its hope is not in itself. It is rather a hope in the Kingdom of God, as the future of the world" (101). "Man is drawn into conflict between hope and experience", and in this conflict "hope must prove its power" (102). Or as Father Browne says: "The more our senses are revolted, uncertain, and in despair, the more surely Faith says: 'This is God: All goes well' " (103).

.....

> Since the theology of the world is not a mere theology of the cosmos nor a mere transcendental theology of the human person and existence, but a theology of the emerging political and social order, this theology of the world must be "a <u>political</u> theology" (104).

Graham Greene realizes that Christian hope must be dynamic, therefore he is politically-minded as well as christian. The political element is always to the fore in his works. From

(100) Hans Küng, <u>The Church</u> (London: Burns and Oates, 1967) p.323.
(101) J.B. Metz: <u>Theology of the World</u>, ed. cit. p.94.
(102) J. Moltmann, op. cit. p.18.
(103) <u>The Living Room</u>, p.68.
(104) J.B. Metz: <u>Theology of the World</u>, p.96.

The Name of Action, and Rumour at Nightfall to The Comedians this element is rarely absent. In The Heart of the Matter he severely criticizes the corruption brought by Europeans to primitive Africa, and in The Power and the Glory the person of the lieutenant embodies a political situation. In Journey without Maps he shows us a negative of European civilization. Dr. Czinner, in Stamboul Train, is a political refugee. In The Comedians it is the priest's sermon that seems to summarize Greene's political attitude as a Christian.

Both Catholic and non-Catholic critics have failed to understand Graham Greene. Greene says that after Brighton Rock,

> "Catholics began to treat my faults too kindly, as though I were a member of a clan and could not be disowned" (105),

but many Catholics have also accused him of heresies ranging from Manicheism to Neo-Calvinism. Catholic theology, however, is throwing off the shackles of narrowness and is discovering new horizons; it is re-interpreting the famous axiom: "Outside the Church there is no salvation"; it is recognizing the ecclesial character of non-R.C. communities, and the authentically religious values to be found in non-Christian religions as expressions of uncovenanted grace mediated through Christ beyond his visible Fold. It is beginning to recognize genuine

(105) B.R., (London: W. Heinemann and The Bodley Head, 1970), p.vii.

Revelation outside the boundaries of Israel and Christianity. It is affirming, with the Second Vatican Council, "the saving presence of God in the secular, political, social, and economic evolution of mankind" (106).

Hans Küng writes:

> The very fact that the young Church was itself regarded as "heretical" must have made it cautious and wary in its relations with heretics. The greater number of believers is not automatically a sign of true Faith; God is not, after all, on the side of the big battalions (107).
>
> As we have seen, the concept of the Church can rightly be applied to the Christian Churches which compose a community of baptized Christians united by the Message of the New Testament (108).

When reading such passages as these and the work of J.B. Metz "About the Belief of the Unbeliever" (109), one recalls what Rose is told by a priest about Péguy, or the story entitled "A Visit to Morin" (110). Some Catholics have not appreciated Greene's "Catholic" novels and plays because, as Greene himself expresses it:

> One could assert therefore that they were orthodox; yet the orthodox critics seemed to scent heresy like a rat dead somewhere under the boards, at a spot they could not locate (111).

(106) E. Schillebeeckx, op. cit. pp.121-122.
(107) Hans Küng, The Church, op. cit. p.242.
(108) Ibid. p.317.
(109) In The Church and the World (New York: Paulist Press, 1965) p.61.
(110) Graham Greene, A Sense of Reality (London: The Bodley Head, 1963), pp.79-96.
(111) Ibid. p.82.

Today Greene's theology is not only welcome to the new theology of hope but is greeted as a brave pioneer in days when that theology had hardly begun to sir.

It is not a facile optimism. Greene knows that "light and darkness are not equally distributed between Church and heresy" (112); that wheat and tares grow up together; that "hope does not mean that the promise will be fulfilled without trouble and suffering"; but this is not evidence that Greene is a victim of pessimism and bitterness. He may depict hope as "martyrdom", but "it is not evil but goodness which has the last word" - it is <u>per viam crucis ad lucem</u>, the genuine Christian hope.

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(112) Hans Küng, <u>The Church</u>, op. cit. p.247.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ESSENTIAL PRIESTHOOD AS PORTRAYED BY GRAHAM GREENE

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The Church is immersed in the world, not poised over it in judgement, and therefore the radical changes that have come about and given rise to crises in the intellectual, social, and moral domains are having repercussions within the Church and especially within the priesthood or ministry of all the Christian Churches. In several of his writings Graham Greene deals with the Catholic priest in critical situations, as we have seen in our study of individual characters, so now I wish to gather together some of the strands and present a synthesis, as Greene envisages it, of what one may call the essential priesthood, and thus link up priestly character in the literary sense with that more profound and theological concept of the priest's sacramental Character as understood by the Catholic Church. I also wish to point to the value of Greene's writings as a source of self-examination and consolation to priests caught in the toils of the recently-recognized priestly crisis.

1. When Greene began to create his priest characters as far back as 1934 with the publication of It's a Battlefield, but more arrestingly with Brighton Rock in 1938, the wind of change was beginning to blow within the Catholic Church, but a strongly

centralized Government wielding strict censorship and authoritarian attitudes muffled the voices of dissent and clamours for new orientations. The author himself incurred ecclesiastical displeasure and reproach when The Power and the Glory appeared (1), thereby joining company with several of the Church's most illustrious theologians and Scripture scholars (2). The Second Vatican Council ushered in a new climate, and from a protectionist and paternalist state of mind the Church has been launched out to deal with the modern world as it is. No longer is the watchword one of self-preservation in all the minutiae of inherited custom, theological stance, and canonical structure, but one of venturing forth even into wild uncharted seas in order to go to the rescue, the redemption, of men and men's creations. The watchword is brotherhood rather than authority, service rather than command, dialogue rather than Ipsa dixit; a service that seeks to learn as well as teach, that yearns to heal by inspiring rather than keeping in splints, that builds bridges of communication rather than fortifications. And yet the Church has a treasure it must preserve and bestow, it has permanent values that must not be squandered. The great question is: what is essential as belonging to its very nature and mission in the world, and what is expendable or adaptable to changing

(1) Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory, The Collected Edition, (London: Heinemann and Bodley Head, 1971) p.xi.
(2) Examples are Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, Teilhard de Chardin, and much earlier, the distinguished Scripture scholar Lagrange.

conditions?

The priesthood is regarded by the Church as belonging to the essence of the Church. Every baptized member of the Church shares in some way the one and only priesthood, that of Christ; but the Catholic Church (together with the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches) maintains that the man in Holy Orders - the bishop, priest, and deacon - is not just a functionary empowered by the people as a man chosen by them to carry out certain ministerial tasks for the sake of law and order and greater efficiency, but a man who through Church authority is sealed with the Holy Spirit and commissioned by the Spirit to share in the Headship of Christ the Prophet, Priest, and King in order to serve the Church and the whole world by authentic proclamation of the Word of God, by the celebration of the Eucharist and the Sacraments, and by exercising leadership in the formation of Christian consciences and communitarian witness to the grace of God given us in Christ. If Baptism effectively symbolizes man's response to God's call, Holy Orders effectively symbolize that call itself, that constant, tireless, unbroken, challenging divine invitation to enter into dialogue with God by faith and through faith to enter into the very Life of God (3). This is the essential priesthood that abides no matter how many secondary roles of the priest may change.

In the modern world the Catholic priest is being asked to

(3) Tibor Horvath, S.J., "The Sacrament of Ordination as Revelation of God", in The Heythrop Journal, (B.H. Blackwell Ltd), Oxford, January 1971, pp. 44-52.

shed many of the attributes and functions of former times. No longer is he a remote, almost hieratic, figure standing far away from the worshippers. He may still be referred to as a "man of the cloth", but that cloth is not expected to be so starched and studded with gold brocade as to render him immune to criticism by his devoted flock. The elimination of social privileges and the weakening of the sense of the sacred among people in general have conspired to make the priest look from the outside like an anachronism, and have prompted the priest to look into himself and ask: "Who, really, am I? What do people see in me?" (4).

My contention is that Graham Greene has given illuminating and dramatic answers to these basic questions. He casts most of his priests in extreme situations - persecution, physical and moral wretchedness, intellectual uncertainty and obscuration - as if to emphasize that the whole Church, the priestly people of God whose mission it is to declare the wonderful things God has done for the world's redemption, has now entered a phase of history similar in many ways to that of the early Church before Constantine, before Christianity was recognized and honoured by the State. It is increasingly what Karl Rahner calls a "diaspora" situation (5) where even in traditionally

(4) Cfr. David P. O'Neill, The Priest in Crisis (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1968), p.1.
(5) Karl Rahner: Mission and Grace, vol. 1 (London Sheed and Ward), pp. 3 - 55.

Christian countries Church membership of committed Christians comprises only a minority of the population and where the voice of the Church is scarcely heard above the din of the mass communications media that serve the interests of science, money, politics, or a humanism torn from its Christian roots. Increasingly the Church is becoming the patrimony of small groups who can withstand outside pressures of the materialistic environment, and the priest is regarded as the chief guardian of eternal values and the acknowledged and authorized interpreter of their application to a changing world. But here again there is doubt and difficulty for the priest who no longer feels happy with the cut-and-dried solutions to moral problems given him by the ordinary text-books, whose pastoral work has in many respects been taken over by experts in counselling, social welfare, administration, etc. (6), and whose text-book dogmatic theology has been rendered largely obsolete by new discoveries in Scriptural interpretation and new insights into the cultic usages of the Church.

2. Three of Graham Greene's priest characters deserve special mention here because they illustrate the threefold crisis:

(6) Lash-Rhymer, The Christian Priesthood, 9th Downside Symposium, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1970): The role of the clergy, pp. 165-186.

moral, pastoral, and intellectual through which many priests are going today; they are the "whisky priest", in The Power and the Glory; Father Browne, in The Living Room; and Father Callifer, in The Potting Shed. Each of these priests suffers spoliation, and taken in the above order, a spoliation of increasing severity.

a) The "whisky priest" is the victim of a double persecution: he is hunted down by the police of the godless state of Tabasco, but he is pursued still more relentlessly by his own consciousness of guilt and moral laxity. He is in a wretched state of ill-health, is ever on the run, and moves in a climate that drains every ounce of energy. He is a nervous wreck and almost an alcoholic. He lives like a tramp and feels himself the butt of scorn even by his own scattered flock. He is constantly tempted to seek refuge beyond the water in Vera Cruz, if only to regain his peace of soul through the Sacrament of Penance, because in Tabasco there is no other priest available or willing to shrive him. A momentary sexual lapse gives him an illegitimate daughter, and that lapse haunts him unceasingly, corroding the last remnants of his self-respect. And yet he carries on, preaching the word of God and celebrating the Eucharist wherever he can find small groups of believers ready to risk their lives for the faith. He is in the depths of moral despondency himself, and yet he waxes eloquent when he speaks to his people of heaven and the goodness of creation

and the Infinite Mercy of Christ. He longs to get away from Tabasco and resume normal clerical duties in a state where the Church is more tolerated, but it seems that a Force greater than himself is keeping him to the grind.

If he leaves Tabasco "it would be as if God in all this space between the sea and the mountains ceased to exist" (7). Why? Because the priest guarantees the sacramental Presence of God incarnate in Christ. The people, for all their ignorance and superstition, sense this essential task of the priest. They know that God is everywhere and the image of God is in every man, but they also recognize in the priest, as such, a man who brings the Risen Lord of creation into intimate contact with his brethren and his brethren into the supreme Offering of the Son to the Father. The people are divided in their opinions about the moral worth of the "whisky priest", but they all agree that his priestly office does not depend entirely for its effectiveness on this moral worthiness, and many of them are not too worried by the sight of his human weaknesses. It is perhaps the Lutherans and the atheistic lieutenant who see most clearly beyond the appearances to the essential nobility of the priest's soul. The Lutherans think him a good man at the service of a misguided theology; the lieutenant also thinks him a good man at the service of the Enemy of the people. It is the self-complacent devotees among his own flock who think him an utter

(7) <u>The Power and the Glory</u>, ed. cit. p.80.

failure and a disgrace to his high calling.

Greene here poses one of the great problems exercising the minds of many priests today. How far should they "desacralize" their appearance before the world in order to make closer contact with the world for its own introduction into the divine? How essential are rules and regulations, even in the application of moral principles? Legalism is dealt a stunning blow in the portrayal of the "whisky priest", much to the horror of devout people who dismissed the novel as a mockery of the priesthood. But Greene's travels and observation of human nature combined with his Catholic faith to make him aware that a shift of emphasis was taking place in the Church. It took the great Vatican II Council to "canonize" what he had surmised, namely, that love for God is incarnate in love for man, and that love is not hidebound but liberates a man to give himself with all his faults and failings. Where there is no self-giving there is no Christianity in action.

The question of priestly celibacy, so much in the air today, is presented by Greene as an ideal which the whisky priest made his own both before and after his lapse. Being a man of radical honesty and charity, the priest is a martyr to his love for his own daughter, but even so, he never contemplated surrendering to the State by marrying in defiance of the vow he had taken in his youth. The priest is aware that although celibacy does not belong to the essential conditions for

exercising the priesthood, he personally is aware that Christ calls him to remain unmarried so that he may be more directly united with Christ and more widely available to serve his people. Graham Greene delves into the priest's sense of identity with Christ as in some way surpassing ordinary moral demands and inspiring fidelity in excruciating circumstances. By contrast, he has a pathetic description of a Padre José who, to save his own skin, did contract a legal marriage, but whose spiritual influence was rendered practically null, and whose own conscience was seared in its depths. Even the youngsters of the town thought it great fun to make a mockery of him. Padre José's absolute domination by a termagant of a wife should not be taken as a reflection on the married priesthood - and Vatican II was careful to avoid all aspersions on the married priests of eastern rites both within and outside her Fold - but it does point to the value of celibacy in the priest when the Church is in a state of extreme emergency. In a changing world the Church may well come to see that celibacy, however much the ideal for her priests, demands so many other qualities to preserve it from selfish bachelorhood that in many countries a married priesthood could render better service; and yet when persecution rages, the celibate priest is in a better position to assume dynamic leadership and not count the cost. In the case of the whisky priest it was the prelude to martyrdom.

b) Towering over the whisky priest's shortcomings is his belief in the sacramental Presence and Action of Christ in the Eucharist and the other Sacraments for which he is the responsible instrument, and this belief is fully shared by Father Browne, the cripple priest in The Living Room, whose constant lament is that in his physical condition he is "useless" as a priest: he cannot say Mass, he cannot visit the sick, he cannot be active pastorally. And yet Greene presents him as a man of complete self-composure, serenity, and even vitality. He cannot ascend the pulpit, but he sustains an enlightened dialogue with an agnostic psychiatrist; he cannot prevent his niece from committing suicide, but he can dispose her to prayer and with prophetic anger denounce a pseudo-religious atmosphere that precipitated the tragedy:

> "Blame our dead goodness. Holy books, holy pictures, a subscription to the Altar Society. Do you think, is she had come into a house where there was love, she wouldn't have hesitated, thought twice, talked to us?.." (8)

The priest is a man for others. His pastoral ministry deals essentially with people and personal relationships, not with buildings, money, organizations, etc. Greene presents us a priest tied to a wheel-chair, but still voicing the fundamental truth of the Gospel, the primacy of love. He does not discuss in theological detail the doctrine of shared mediatorship with Christ, but he shows us mediation in action as

(8) Three Plays, ed. cit. p.50.

exercised by the priest in ordinary life. The priest is not a mere paid guest-speaker whose job it is to give comfort to the congregation - as the minister is thought to be in some of the non-conformist traditions - but the prophet whose message is not his own and yet entirely possesses him. He reproaches his own sisters when they don the judge's cap:

> "Do you think you know a mortal sin when you see it? You're wiser than the Church then" (9).

The whole Church of Christ is endowed with the spirit of prophecy, but by his ordination a priest is commissioned to speak in the name of Church, not disdaining to sit at the feet of the lowliest believer if the Spirit gives utterance thereby, but with an ear attuned to the apostolic witness handed on throughout the ages. The ministry of the word is paramount in the Church, and the bishop its main mouthpiece. From the bishop the priest and the deacon receive "faculties" to preach, but this must not prevent all other members of the Church from bearing witness. Part of the crisis experienced by the priest today is the linguistic gap between the Church and the world which makes it difficult for the priest to get the Message across to people subject to the different idiom of worldly concerns. Greene exemplifies this in Father Browne's dialogue with the psychiatrist and even with his grand-niece who has

(9) Ibid. p.48.

drifted away from the Christian faith. But while the two elderly spinster sisters have all the jargon of religion and the mannerisms of piety, when it comes down to the basic Gospel language of concern for others, the gap between them and their brother priest is perhaps even greater than between the priest and the two younger people, one a scientist and the other still in the adolescent stage of immaturity. This points up a crisis in the pastoral ministry of the Church at large and in particular of the priest. With the passing of cultural forms of expression - in language, custom, outlook, human relationships, philosophy, and value judgements - that dominated western civilization for so long, and while new forms are being minted, there is a transitional phase of ambiguity that makes it difficult for a man to speak to man in matters of the spirit. There is not only a generation gap between the world and the Church but also, and this is a conviction often voiced by Greene, a cosmic struggle between the self-attributed creative powers of man and the same creative powers of man seeking liberation and fulfilment from a Source beyond all human inventiveness. And the crux is literally the Cross: either we take up the cross and in death find fulfilment through the crucified and risen Christ, or we strain all our energies to eliminate the cross and divert our attention from all that points to death and beyond death. The pastoral crisis of the priest is succinctly focused by Greene in the post-mortem reflexions of Michael Dennis, the

psychiatrist, who fails to see the sense of belief in a god who did not prevent a tragedy, and the priest's self-confessed ignorance of the answer together with his firm assurance that the answer will be forthcoming one day and be a glorious surprise for all who in life had opened their hearts to love:

> Michael: And <u>you</u> believe God made the world like that.
> James: Yes. And I believe He shared its pain. But He didn't only make the world - He made eternity. Suffering is a problem to us, but it doesn't seem a big problem to the woman when she has borne her child. Death is our child, we have to go through pain to bear our death. I'm crying out with the pain like you. But Rose - she's free, she's borne her child (10).

The priesthood is a "configuration" to Christ the one Mediator and Priest (11) not only in Christ's active ministry of preaching and healing, but also and particularly in His sufferings. In Father Browne, and in most of the priests described by Graham Greene, we have the accent on this likeness to Christ in His suffering; we have an example of that "divinization of the passivities of diminishment" of which Teilhard de Chardin speaks so eloquently in his little book "Le Milieu Divin" wherein self-development and self-detachment are fruitfully reconciled (12). We have in Father Browne a symbol of the "cripple" Church, seemingly stagnant in a go-getting world,

(10) Ibid. p.69.
(11) See <u>Documents of Vatican II</u> (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966) pp. 533 and fol.
(12) Teilhard de Chardin, <u>Le Milieu Divin</u> (Collins, Fontana Books, 1957) pp. 74 and fol.

but secretly more alive and redemptive than in the hey-day of her civilizing conquests.

c) The intellectual crisis of priests today is the most disturbing of all. How far it is due to a decline in real faith or to a refining process initiated by the Spirit of Truth and Love is a moot question. My study of Father Callifer in The Potting Shed has led me to conclude that his was the latter case, but voices of warning and alarm are being raised by eminent theologians pointing to the weakening of faith in many priests. Yves Congar, for example, writes:

> Today's culture is a totally secular one. Its leaders are for the most part atheists. My generation has to make a great effort to grasp the novelty of contemporary problems... The magisterium of the Church is not infrequently short-sighted (13).

Edward Schillebeeckx speaks of refusing to identify the faith with the cultural conditioning of its formulas, and remarks:

> Is there, then, no precise content of faith? Of course there is. But there is no explicitly fixed representation of truth - which is not the same thing. Faith becomes meaningless without content, and it would become meaningless too if this content of faith were susceptible of constant change. But the inviolable aspect of the content of faith is situated in an inexpressible objective perspective which is again and again meaningfully suggested from and in a changing historical outline and which makes itself felt in every historical outline - the mystery is always giving us to think (14).

(13) Yves Congar, "The Frontiers of Theology", The Tablet (26.9.70).
(14) Edward Schillebeeckx, God the Future of Man (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969) p.40.

So, while the older generation of priests find it difficult to extricate themselves from time-worn formulas of dogmatic theology, the younger budding theologians find themselves perplexed and unsettled when trying to grasp the new:

> Today - again on the average - things are changed. The young theologian (above all the talented one, but not only he) suffers from a real poverty of faith... He no longer has convictions of faith accepted as foregone conclusions in such an undisturbed manner as in the past (15).

Christ, looking into the future, predicts:

> Take care that no one deceives you; because many will come using my name and saying "I am the Christ", and they will deceive many.... And then many will fall away... Many false prophets will arise; they will deceive many, and with the increase of lawlessness, love in most men will grow cold, but the man who stands firm to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:4,5, 11, 12).

Graham Greene depicts Father Callifer as apparently a man merely going through the motions of worship and pastoral care, as a man devoid of faith; and yet he is a convert to a Catholicism from agnosticism who in former years was full of enthusiasm for his new-found treasure and was willing to deprive himself of all human comfort in order to follow what he thought was his vocation to spend himself in the service of the faith as a priest. As a priest he seems to have met with little understanding and appreciation from his bishop and even his fellow

(15) K. Rahner, Theological Investigations (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), vol. 6, p.118.

priests. He is cut off from his relatives who disown him after his conversion. He goes from one assignment to another until he is dumped into a little rural parish where he is living in a tawdry, uncomfortable house, served by a nagging and insolent housekeeper. He finds some little relief in drink, but inwardly he is desolate.

Towards the end of the play we are allowed to glimpse the secret of his deplorable state: an extraordinary happening one day in the garden of his brother's house - a famous agnostic writer - when his nephew is found in the potting shed after committing suicide, and Father Callifer, summoning all his strength to plead for his nephew's return to life, offeres to God even the thing he cherishes most, his faith. The nephew, like another Lazarus, comes back to life; but the priest is taken at his word and is plunged into spiritual desolation.

For the introduction of a "miracle" in this play and in the novel, The End of the Affair, Graham Greene has been ridiculed by critics who have accused Greene of allowing superstition or theological presuppositions to mar his integrity as a writer, but my view is that, apart from raising a hornets' nest in order to disturb self-reliant agnosticism, Greene is pointing to the possibility of a mystical upheaval in the Church whereby Christians fully committed to Christ, and priests in particular, are being asked to undergo a very

severe trial in their whole apprehension and experience of the faith so that they can rethink the faith to its very roots, dislodge themselves from traditional easy-going assumptions connected with the faith, and for the first time perhaps in history begin to feel the plight of agnosticism and so-called atheism in order to be of service in a modern world where faith is losing its hold.

Intellectual obscurity is not dissipated by the memorization and recitation of formulas, even credal formulas, as though they were so many mantrams that could lay the ghosts of doubt. The human mind has to battle with the ambiguities of life here and now and let the Spirit shine through from a core of impenetrable mystery. The priest, as the "mystery man", has to feel this Spirit working in the modern world, in modern man, but he must first experience something of the emptiness that has brought modern man to the verge of despair if he is going to prove an instrument for the salvation and hope of modern man. Father Callifer's "dark night" began with a heroic - and humanly mad - self-offering for his nephew; the priest today, if he has real concern for his unbelieving and despairing brethren beyond the limits of the visible Church, will consent to this darkening of the mind in his desire to bring illumination to the world.

> The whole strength of Christian faith, its capacity to endure and grow until the end of time, consists in this: that it looks back to an historical person

> only to see him proclaiming as fact the Kingdom to which we shall always aspire, and plunged into darkness and death just as we in our aspiration are contradicted by the facts of this world (16).

The priest is essentially the Mystery man - the man of the Paschal Mystery - who not only believes but also celebrates this Mystery of Life in death, Light in darkness, Joy in sorrow. The whisky priest who "cried out stubbornly in a voice of authority, 'That is why I tell you that heaven is here' (17) from the depths of his wretchedness; the crippled priest who said to the psychiatrist:

> "There's one thing I remember from the seminary. I've forgotten nearly all the things they taught me, even the arguments for the existence of God. It comes from some book of devotion. 'The more our senses are revolted, uncertain and in despair, the more surely Faith says: 'This is God: all goes well' " (18);

and Father Callifer who asked by James whether he really believed, replied:

> "He answered my prayer, didn't he? He took my offer. Look around you. Look at this room. It makes sense, doesn't it, now"...

and then got up, paused, looked up at a hideous picture of Christ and said:

> "I thought I had lost Him for ever" (19);

these are the essential priests voicing their essential

(16) The Christian Priesthood, op. cit. Sebastian Moore, "The secular implications of liturgy", p.219.
(17) P.G., ed. cit. p.86.
(18) Th.P., ed. cit. p.68.
(19) Ibid. p.139.

priesthood. They are voicing it not only for themselves but for others too.

Graham Greene recognizes the work of grace everywhere and yet sees the priest as vital to the whole sacramental structure where grace is given and from which grace is diffused throughout the world. He is little concerned and almost irritated with any form of clericalism; he is concerned to strip the priest of all but the essentials of the priesthood in order to show its abiding values. We priests are grateful to Graham Greene, now.

3. It has been remarked that even when the priest in Graham Greene's works "is a minor character... he invariably influences the plot out of all proportion to the size of his role" (20). Some critics would attribute this to ideological prejudices, but in reality it is merely the result of Greene's focusing of life and life's problems sub specie aeternitatis which alone does full justice to man and man's overriding concerns and destiny wherein divine invitation and human response are the vital issues for each individual and for human society, issues in which the priest is called to play what we might term an obstetric role (21). Hence the calamity when a priest betrays his divine mission (22).

(20) F.L. Kunkel, op. cit. p.155.
(21) St. Paul attributes to himself a maternal role. Gal. 4:19.
(22) "Quel échec, pour un catholique, pouvait être plus affreux que celui d'un prêtre, seul représentant d'un Dieu banni au milieu d'une population de milliers de personnes, et qui, cependant, trahit sa divine mission?". R. Matthews, op. cit. pp.219-220.

Graham Greene has little to say about the priest as a public figure but much to say about the priest in his own struggles of conscience and in his individual encounters with other people. He occasionally gives us snatches of sermons, but only to show how down-to-earth they are while remaining firmly anchored to supernatural realities; he never depicts them as rhetoricians. In this he also gives us a preview of a change of climate in preaching; simple heart-felt homilies (chats) instead of oratorical declamations are now the modern style which Vatican II has insisted upon.

Christian theology is veering more and more towards the Gospel's message of liberation and hope, a much-needed counter-part to the wave of pessimism engulfing existentialist philo-sophy and the universal sense of boredom that oppresses people today despite, or perhaps because of, technological triumphs. Greene does not delve into theological analysis in support of this Christian forward-looking attitude; not once does he mention the word "eschatological"; he merely incarnates the message in the speech and manner of priests who emphasize the primacy of love, of God's love for the world and each human being with all the directness and energy of the Joannine tradition, and shows how this recognition of the Fatherhood of God is the mainspring of true brotherhood among men, the priest himself stressing his brotherly role and the service of his brethren in Christ rather than any prerogatives he might claim

deriving from the title of Father given him by the people to whom he ministers. And here too we see a shift of emphasis given eloquent utterance at the Council several years after Greene's publications and while the ordinary training to the priesthood was still centred on the priest as a man set apart and in command, descending from the heights like Moses and instilling awe with the splendour of his divine communication in solitary prayer. The dichotomy between prayer and the works of the ministry, which a self-regarding spirituality fostered, was disposed of at Vatican II, but in Graham Greene it hardly makes it appearance, except in a few unfavourable portrayals such as those of Fathers Clay and Thomas which are not typical of Greene's idea of the priesthood however much they conform to the older type formed by pre-Vatican seminaries.

While Greene allows actions to speak louder than words, he constantly invites his readers to enter a realm beyond both, a realm in which the priesthood has its essential being, the realm of grace and sin, of God and Satan, of Sacrament and profanation, of hope and despair, of theological dimensions. He shows the difference between the manhood of the priest and the priestly office, but while distinguishing them, does not separate or confuse them (23). He shows the priest, whatever his personal shortcomings, as the bearer of powers beyond

(23) Graham Greene, "In the footsteps of a priest", The Daily Telegraph Magazine (No. 338, April 16, 1971) pp. 45-46.

anything this world can give or take away. He shows these powers at work in human weakness, and thus in these days of depression among priests he has a message of encouragemant.

This concern to reveal the essentials of the Catholic priesthood in men of flesh and blood whose role of the Good Shepherd finds expression in the very exercise of pastoral care that unifies their lives and activities around the Eucharistic Sacrifice, become the centre and root of their whole priestly life (24), is aptly combined with an eagerness to show the need for human qualities such as those emphasized by the Vatican Council: "kindliness of heart, sincerity, strength of soul and constancy, assiduous regard for justice, and urbanity" (25). Greene has meditated on that injunction of the Apostle:

> Whatever things are true, whatever honourable, whatever just, whatever holy, whatever lovable, whatever of good repute; if there be any virtue, if anything worthy of praise, think upon these things (Phil. 4:8)

and has applied it to his priests, especially to the "whisky priest" in his dealings with the lieutenant, the priests of the leper colony in their dealings with the non-believer Dr. Colin, Father Browne when speaking to the psychiatrist, and other priests when face to face with so-called atheists. In thus attributing to priests this openness and ability to

(24) Documents of Vatican II, ed. cit. p.563.
(25) Ibid. p.538.

discern truth and goodness behind the façade of self-confessed unbelief Greene also anticipated Vatican II and much of modern theology which, while acknowledging Christ as "the only Name under heaven whereby salvation comes to men" (Acts 4:12), sees the grace of God at work even where Christ is not explicitly confessed - "anonymous Christianity", and therefore urges Christians, and especially priests, to enter dialogue with non-believers (26).

What of the future? The triple distinction of bishop, priest, and deacon derives from apostolic times, or very soon afterwards, but it is hotly discussed at ecumenical theological gatherings whether this structure belongs to the Gospel as such or merely to Church institution in the light of cultural and sociological environment. One thing, however, is certain: that Christianity is not just an individual vertical relationship between God and man, but also a collective horizontal relationship based on fraternal love; and as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it:

"Multi non adunantur in unum nisi per unum";

therefore a visible society must have a visible leader, and

(26) K.Rahner, Sacramentum Mundi, ed.cit. vol.1, p.335, and The Christian of the Future (London: Burns and Oates, 1966), p.35; Werner Post, Sacramentum Mundi, ed. cit. vol. 3,p.423; Marcel Reding, ibid., p.432; Roger Lincoln Shinn, Man: The New Humanism (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), pp.116-127; and particularly Roger Garaudy, From Anathema to Dialogue (London: Collins, 1967). The recent General Assembly of the Jesuits stresses - Decrees 11 and 16 - the need to establish dialogue with atheists: Annuarium Societatis Jesu, 1965-1966 (Rome: Casa Generalizia), Editio Linguae anglicae, pp. 30-31.

that leader of the Christian society is called the priest, who is chosen from men to share in the Priesthood of Christ. Crises are moments of radical decision and judgement before God, and the present crisis affecting priests, says a noted theologian,

> must be seen against the background of various factors present within the Church today. Nonetheless, I am of the opinion that this phenomenon must be viewed in relation to men's anxiety about the unstructured future. Whereas in earlier times it was possible to say, simply in the light of the past, "This is the work of the priesthood and it is up to me to do it", henceforward the priest must discover what his real work is. Everywhere the change in orientation from past to future is accompanied by a crisis of identity. This is natural. It is like children entering adolescence. We are being forced out of the warm nest of our cultural past to set off towards a future which we must construct for ourselves (27).

But not everything is amenable to change, and Graham Greene, anticipating by several years the present crisis among priests (28), has given us a dramatic portrayal of the priesthood's essentials shining through after prestige, prerogative, and cultural trappings have been torn away.

(27) Edward Schillebeeckx, op. cit. p.177.
(28) In a personal letter, dated 30 September 1967, Graham Greene wrote me the following: "It is perfectly true that most of my work has been done before the priesthood crisis. Perhaps I could claim that I a little anticipated it in the sense that all my priests have lived on the border of crisis".

CONCLUSION

The theological dimension of Graham Greene's writings is the very air in which his characters move and have their being. Theology wells up even when we least expect it. For example, in one of his short stories A Visit to Morin (29), he poses the great problem about "the belief of the unbeliever" and "the unbelief of the believer", a problem that is occupying some of the keenest theological minds in the Church today. Words that he puts into the mouth of a Lutheran, Mr. Lehr:

> "It seems to me you people make a lot of fuss about inessentials" (30)

might also be taken as a governing principle of his own efforts to drive deep into fundamentals, into faith, hope, love, grace, sin, salvation or damnation, leaving aside the withered themes of theological speculation that so engrossed our forebears.

Theology today seeks to build upon human realities in the light of divine revelation, not spin tenuous conceptual cobwebs. Knowledge of God is obtained through knowledge of man created in God's image and likeness. God's incomprehensibility still remains after all our striving. Only the God Incarnate can, through his human nature and through our fellow men, lift us up ad Patrem by communicating to us His Spirit and challenging

(29) Graham Greene, A Sense of Reality (London: The Bodley Head, 1963), pp. 79-96.
(30) P.G., ed. cit. p.209.

us to love one another as He has loved us. To this challenge we either rise or fail to rise; if we rise, we shall relish how good the Lord is; if we fail to meet the challenge, we shall wander in the shallows of unworthy substitutes for God and succumb to the tedium vitae that threatens to sap not only religion but also our efforts to promote human well-being.

The outstanding merit of Graham Greene is to have presented us an interpretation of Catholic theology in its basic themes and in terms of dramatic situation and realistic characterization, thus allowing truth and goodness to explode into beauty of form. To ignore this theological dimension is to deprive his writings of a transcendental quality that will ensure him a permanent place among modern Christian prophets. His voice is the voice of the authentic prophet cognizant of the enveloping darkness but pointing out the way of redemption. Hope is his theme. The Grace of God everywhere abounding is the light in which he finds meaningfulness in creation. And when he deals with the priest, the embodiment of the values he most cherishes, he confounds all sceptics by making one of them say with the greatest of naturalness:

"You see, I am a very happy man" (31).

(31) Twenty-One Stories (London: Heinemann, 1960), p.146.

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